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TOKYO VICE

An American Reporter on the Police Beat in Japan

JAKE ADELSTEIN

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Pantheon Books, New York

Dedicated to—

Detective Sekiguchi,
who taught me what it was to be an honorable man. I'm trying.

My father,
who has always been my hero and who taught me to stand up
for what's right.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department and the
Federal Bureau of Investigation,
for protecting me and my friends and family, and for their constant
efforts to keep the forces of darkness in check.

Those whom I loved and who have left and will not return.
You are missed and remembered.

会うは別れの始め

Meeting is merely the beginning of separation.

—Japanese proverb

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PRELUDE

Ten Thousand Cigarettes

"Either erase the story, or we'll erase you. And maybe your family. But we'll do them first, so you learn your lesson before you die."

The well-dressed enforcer spoke very slowly, the way people speak to idiots or children or the way Japanese sometimes speak to clueless foreigners.

It seemed like a straightforward proposition.

"Walk away from the story and walk away from your job, and it'll be like it never happened. Write the article, and there is nowhere in this country that we will not hunt you down. Understand?"

It's never a smart idea to get on the bad side of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest organized crime group. With about forty thousand members, it's a lot of people to piss off.

The Japanese mafia. You can call them *yakuza*, but a lot of them like to call themselves *gokudo*, meaning literally "the ultimate path." The Yamaguchi-gumi is the top of the gokudo heap. And among the many subgroups that make up the Yamaguchi-gumi, the Goto-gumi, with more than nine hundred members, is the nastiest. They slash the faces of film directors; they throw people from hotel balconies; they drive bulldozers into people's houses. Stuff like that.

The man sitting across the table and offering me this deal was from the Goto-gumi.

He didn't make the proposal in a menacing way. He didn't sneer or squint his eyes. Except for the dark suit, he didn't even look like a yakuza. He had all his fingers. He didn't roll his *r*'s like the heavies in the movies. If anything, he was more like a slightly surly waiter at a fancy restaurant.

He let the ash from his cigarette fall onto the carpet, then stubbed it out undramatically in the ashtray. He lit up another with a gold-plated Dunhill. He was smoking Hope. White box, block letters—reporters notice stuff like that—but they weren't standard Hope cigarettes. They were the half-size, stubby version. Higher nicotine; lethal.

The yakuza had come to this meeting with one other enforcer, who said absolutely nothing. The Silent One was thin and dark with a horselike face, and he had a messy long haircut dyed orange—the *chahatsu* look. He had on an identical dark suit.

I had come with backup, a low-ranking cop formerly assigned to the Anti–Organized Crime Task Force in Saitama Prefecture. Chiaki Sekiguchi. He was a little taller than I, almost as dark, thickset with deep-set eyes and a 1950s Elvis haircut. He was mistaken for a yakuza a lot. If he'd gone the other way, I'm sure he would have been a well-respected crime boss. He was a great cop, a good friend, my mentor in a lot of ways, and he had volunteered to come along. I glanced at him. He raised his eyebrows, cocked his head, and shrugged his shoulders. He wasn't going to give me any more advice. Not now. I was on my own.

"Do you mind if I smoke a cigarette while I think this over?"

"Be my guest," the yakuza said, more diffident than I.

I pulled a pack of Gudang Garam, Indonesian clove cigarettes, out of my suit jacket. They were loaded with

nicotine and tar, and they smelled like incense, which reminded me of my days living in a Zen temple during college. Maybe I should have become a Buddhist monk. It was a little late now.

I stuck one in my mouth, and as I fumbled for a lighter, the enforcer deftly flicked his Dunhill and held it close until he was sure it was lit. He was very accommodating. Very professional.

I watched the thick smoke waft in concentric circles from the tip of the cigarette; the burning clove leaves embedded in the tobacco snapped and crackled as I inhaled. It seemed to me that the whole world had gone quiet and this was the only sound I could hear. Snapping, crackling, sparking. Cloves tend to do that. I was hoping the sparks wouldn't burn a hole in my suit or his—but then again, after further reflection, I decided I didn't really care.

I didn't know what to do or say. Not a clue. I didn't have enough material to write the story. Hell, it wasn't a story. Yet. He didn't know that but I did. I had only enough information to have gotten me into this unpleasant face-off.

Maybe there was a bright side to this whole problem. Maybe it was time to go home. Yeah, maybe I was tired of working eighty-hour weeks. Maybe I was tired of coming home at two in the morning and leaving at five. I was tired of always being tired.

Tired of chasing after scoops. Tired of being scooped by the competition. Tired of facing six deadlines a day—three in the morning for the evening edition and three at night for the morning edition. Tired of waking up with a hangover every other day.

I didn't think he was bluffing. He seemed very sincere. As far as he was concerned, the story I was trying to write would kill his boss. Not directly, but that would be the result. That would be his *oyabun*, his surrogate father. Tadamasa Goto, the most

notorious Japanese gangster of them all. So naturally, he would feel justified in killing me.

However, if I lived up to my end of the bargain, would they keep theirs? The real problem was that I couldn't write the story. I didn't have all the facts yet. But I couldn't let them know that.

All I knew was this: In the summer of 2001, Tadamasa Goto had gotten a liver transplant at the Dumont-UCLA Liver Cancer Center. I knew, or thought I knew, who the doctor was who had performed the transplant. I knew about how much Goto had allegedly spent to get his liver: close to $1 million according to some sources, $3 million according to others. I knew that some of the money to pay for his hospital expenses had been sent from Japan to the United States via the Tokyo branch office of a Las Vegas casino. What I didn't know was how a guy like that had gotten into the United States in the first place. He must have forged a passport or bribed a Japanese politician or a U.S. politician. Something was fishy. He was on the watch list of U.S. Customs and Immigration, the FBI, the DEA. He was blacklisted. He shouldn't have been able to get into the United States.

I was sure that there was a great story behind the journey of Goto and his operation. It's why I'd been working on it for months. I could only guess that while I was working on the story someone ratted me out.

I noticed that my hands were shaking. The cigarette seemed to have evaporated in my fingers while I was thinking.

I lit a second cigarette. And I thought to myself, how the hell did I end up here?

I had one chance to make the right choice on this one. There wasn't going to be a second meeting. I couldn't print a correction later. I could feel myself starting to panic, my stomach knotting up, my left eye twitching.

I'd been doing this job for more than twelve years, and I was ready to leave. But not like this. How did I get here? It was a good question. It was a better question than the one being asked of me at the moment.

I got lost in thought; I lost count of the number of cigarettes I'd smoked.

"Erase the story, or we erase you" was what the enforcer had said.

That was the proposal.

I didn't have any cards to play, and I was out of cigarettes.

I swallowed, exhaled, swallowed some more, and then muttered my response. "Done," I said. "I will not … write the story … in the *Yomiuri."*

"Good," he said, very pleased with himself. "If I were you, I'd get out of Japan. The old man is mad. You have a wife, two children, right? Take a vacation. Take a long vacation. Maybe look for other work."

Everyone stood. There were the merest of bows—more like inch-long nods and wide-eyed stares that did not waver.

After the enforcer and his helper left, I turned to Sekiguchi. "You think I did the right thing?" I asked.

He put his hand on my shoulder and squeezed a little. "You did the only thing you could. That was the right thing. No story is worth dying for, no story is worth your family dying for. Heroes are just people who have run out of choices. You still had a choice. You made the right choice."

I was numb.

Sekiguchi walked me out of the hotel, and we got into a taxi. In Shinjuku, we found a coffee shop. We slid into a booth. Sekiguchi pulled out his cigarettes and offered me one, which he lit.

"Jake," Sekiguchi began, "you were thinking about leaving the newspaper anyway. Now would be the time. You're not a

coward if you do it. You have no cards to play. The Inagawa-kai? The Sumiyoshi-kai? They're cute compared to these guys. I don't know what the frigging deal is with the liver transplant he got in the United States, but Goto has got to have big reasons why he doesn't want the story to get out. Whatever he did, it's a big deal to him. Retreat."

Then Sekiguchi tapped me on the shoulder to be sure I was paying attention. Looking me right in the eyes with a razor-edged intensity, he went on, "Retreat. But do not give up on that story. Find out what that bastard is afraid of. You'll need to know because your peace treaty with this man will not hold. I guarantee you that. These guys don't forget. You'll need to know. Otherwise you're going to spend the rest of your life in fear. Sometimes you have to pull back to fight back. Don't give up. Wait. Wait a year, two years if you have to. But find out the truth. You're a journalist. That's your job. That's your calling. That's what got you to this point.

"Find out what he's scared that people will find out, what he doesn't want people to know. Because he is a man scared—scared enough to come after you like this. When you know it, you have a card to play. Use it carefully. Then you have a chance to go back to doing what you want to do.

"When I got knocked back down to traffic duty—because someone, one of my own people, set me up for demotion—I wanted to quit the force. Every day I wanted to quit. You cannot imagine how it feels to be a detective and then be forced to write traffic tickets because some dishonorable, insecure know-nothing cannot get ahead any other way. But I had my family to think about. The choice wasn't about me alone. So I waited it out. I had to eat it, day after day, but time passes, and after a while things changed, I was able to make my case, and now I'm back doing what I am pretty good at. You're in the same boat, Jake. Don't give up."

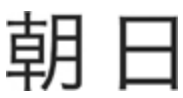
Sekiguchi was right, of course. It wasn't the end.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

There was a time when I wasn't pissing off yakuza, when I wasn't a chain-smoking burned-out ex-reporter with chronic insomnia. There was a time when I didn't know Detective Sekiguchi, the name Tadamasa Goto, or even how to write a decent article on a purse snatching in Japanese, and yakuza were something I knew only from the movies.

There was a time when I was sure I was one of the good guys. It seems like a very long time ago.

PART 1



The Morning Sun

Fate Will Be on Your Side

July 12, 1992, marked the turning point of my education about Japan. I was glued to a position next to the phone, feet inside my mini-refrigerator—in the heat of the summer any cool will do—waiting for a call from the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Japan's most prestigious newspaper. I would land a job as a reporter, or I would remain jobless. It was a long night, the culmination of a process that had stretched out over an entire year.

Not long before that, I had been wallowing in the luxury of not caring a bit about my future. I was a student at Sophia (Joichi) University in the middle of Tokyo, where I was working toward a degree in comparative literature and writing for the student newspaper.

So I had experience, but nothing that would pass for the beginnings of a career. I was a step up from teaching English and was making a decent income translating instructional kung fu videos from English into Japanese. Combined with an occasional gig giving Swedish massage to wealthy Japanese housewives, I earned enough for day-to-day expenses, but I was still leaning on the parents for tuition.

I had no idea what I wanted to do. Most of my fellow students had jobs already promised them before their graduation—a practice called *naitei*, which is unethical, but everyone does it. I had gotten such a promise too, with Sony Computer Entertainment, but it was good only if I extended my schooling for another year. It wasn't a job that I really wanted, but it was, after all, Sony.

So in late 1991, with a very light class load and lots of time on my hands, I decided to throw myself into studying the Japanese language. I made up my mind to take the mass communication

exams for soon-to-be university graduates and try to land a job as a reporter, working and writing in Japanese. I had the fantasy that if I could write for the school newspaper, it couldn't be much more difficult to write for a national newspaper with eight or nine million readers.

In Japan, people don't build a career at the major newspapers by working their way up through local, small-town newspapers. The papers hire the bulk of their reporters straight out of university, but first the cubs have to pass a standardized "entrance exam"—a kind of newspaper SAT. The ritual goes like this: Aspiring reporters report to a giant auditorium and sit for daylong tests. If your score is high enough, you get an interview, and then another, and then another. If you do well enough in your interviews, and if your interviewers like you, then you might get a job promise.

To be honest, I didn't really think I'd be hired by a Japanese newspaper. I mean, what were the chances that a Jewish kid from Missouri would be accepted into this high-end Japanese journalistic fraternity? But I didn't care. If I had something to study for, if I had a goal, however unreachable, the time spent chasing it might have some collateral productivity. At the very least, my Japanese would improve.

But where should I apply? Japan has more than its share of news media, which are also more vital than in the United States.

The *Yomiuri Shinbun* has the largest circulation—more than ten million a day—of any newspaper in Japan and, in fact, the world. *The Asahi Shinbun* used to be a close second—now it's less close but still second. People used to say that the *Yomiuri* was the official organ of the LDP, the conservative Liberal Democratic Party, which has dominated Japanese politics since World War II; the *Asahi* was the official newspaper of the Socialists, who are almost invisible these days; and the *Mainichi Shinbun*, the third largest, was the official newspaper of the anarchists, because the paper could never figure out whose side it was on. *The Sankei Shinbun*, which was then probably the fourth largest paper, was considered to be the voice of

the extreme right; some said it had about as much credibility as a supermarket tabloid. Often, it had some good scoops as well.

Kyodo, the wire service, which is the Associated Press of Japan, was harder to figure out. The service was originally known as Domei and was the official propaganda branch of the World War II–era Japanese government. Not all connections were severed when the firm became independent once the war was over. Furthermore, Dentsu, the largest and most powerful advertising agency in Japan (and the world) has a controlling interest in the company, and that can color its coverage. One thing makes Kyodo a stellar news agency to work for, however: its labor union, which is the envy of every reporter in Japan. The union makes sure that its reporters are able to use the vacation days due them—something very rare at most firms in Japan.

There is also Jiji Press, which is kind of like Kyodo's little brother but a hard worker. It has a smaller readership and fewer reporters. The joke was that Jiji reporters write their articles after reading Kyodo—a cruel joke in a cruel industry.

At first I was leaning toward the *Asahi*, but I started to feel offended by its tendency to put the United States in a bad light at every opportunity. It seemed at odds with the image I thought most people in Japan had of America—as a voice of democracy, spreading liberty and justice throughout the free world.

The editorials of the *Yomiuri* were pretty tough-going, though, very conservative and heavy on kanji (the original Chinese ideographs) and vagueness, but the articles in the national news section really impressed me. At a time when the term "human trafficking" had yet to enter the popular vocabulary, the *Yomiuri* ran a scathing in-depth series on the plight of Thai women being smuggled into Japan as sex workers. The articles treated the women with relative dignity and, if only mildly, was critical of the police for its do-little response to the problem. The paper's stance, it seemed to me, was firmly on the side of the oppressed; it was fighting for justice.

The *Asahi* and the *Yomiuri* had their exams scheduled on the same day. I signed up for the *Yomiuri*'s.

The exam was part of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* Journalism Seminar, a well-known covert method of hiring people before the official job-hunting season begins. It helps them grab the cream of the crop. It's not promoted in a big way, so if you are serious about joining the *Yomiuri*, you must read the paper religiously, or you will miss the golden ticket. Everyone at the university paper who had aspirations of being a *Yomiuri* reporter was checking the paper's pages. In a country where appearances count, I needed to look respectable. I poked through my closet only to discover that the humid summer had turned my two suits into fungal experiments. So I trotted down to a huge discount men's retailer and bought a summer suit for the equivalent of about $300. It was made of a thin fabric that breathed easily and had a nice matte black finish. I looked good in it.

I wanted to wow Inukai, my friend and the editor of the school paper, with my sartorial finesse, but when I showed up at the office, located in a dark, dungeonlike basement, his response was different from what I'd expected.

"Jake-kun, my condolences."

Aoyama-chan, another colleague, looked pensive. She didn't say a word.

I couldn't figure out what was going on.

"What happened? Was it a friend?"

"A friend?"

"Who died?"

"Huh? Nobody died. Everybody I know is fine."

Inukai took off his glasses and polished them with his shirt. "So you bought that suit yourself?"

"Yep. Thirty thousand yen."

Inukai was enjoying this. I could tell because he was squinting like a happy puppy. "What kind of suit did you want to buy?" he asked, all false seriousness.

“The ad said *reifuku.”*

Aoyama-chan tittered.

“What?” I said. “What’s wrong?”

“You idiot! You bought a funeral suit! Not a *reifuku* but a *mofuku!”*

“What’s the difference?”

“Mofuku are black. Nobody wears a black suit to a job interview.”

“Nobody?”

“Well, maybe a yakuza.”

“Well, could I pretend I just got back from a funeral? Maybe I’d get sympathy points.”

“That’s true. People sympathize with the mentally challenged.”

Aoyama chimed in, “Maybe you could apply to be a yakuza instead! They wear black! You could be the first *gaijin* yakuza!”

“He’s not cut out to be a yakuza,” Inukai said. “And what would he do when they threw him out?”

“That’s true,” Aoyama said, nodding. “If it didn’t work out, he’d have a hard time going back to being a writer. It’s hard to type with only nine fingers.”

By now Inukai was on a roll. “I don’t think he could get out of the organization with nine fingers. Eight is more like it. He’s a classic screw-up, rude, clumsy, never on time. A barbarian.”

“I can see that,” Aoyama said. “Actually, he could still hunt and peck. But in terms of a career, I don’t think yakuza is it for him, even if he does look nice in a black suit.”

“So what am I supposed to do?”

“Buy another suit,” they said in unison.

“I don’t have the cash.”

Inukai looked thoughtful. “Hmmm. Maybe you can get away with it because you’re a gaijin. Maybe someone will think it’s cute … if they don’t just decide you’re an idiot.”

So that's what I did.

Funeral suit and all, on May 7, I dragged myself to the first session of the seminar, held at 12:50 P.M. at an impressive-looking place right next to the *Yomiuri Shinbun's* main office. The seminar was to take place over two separate days. The first was a day of classes. The second was *enshuu*, or "field practice," a euphemism for the exams. I was a little surprised to see the word used, because it's basically a military term.*

The seminar started with an opening speech and a lecture "for those of you aspiring to be journalists," followed by a second lecture on the fundamental ethics of newspaper reporting. Then came a two-hour session during which "guys on the front line"—working reporters—talked about their jobs, the joys of getting a scoop, and the agony of being scooped by the competition.

I don't remember many details about the lectures. The long hours spent reading and learning to write semicompetently in Japanese had a downside: my listening ability was piss poor. I wasn't exactly the most fluent of speakers either. I was, however, making a calculated gamble. You had to score well enough on the written test to get even an interview, so I had spent more time on reading and writing than on anything else. I wouldn't say that I was deaf to the Japanese language, just hearing-and speech-impaired.

But from what I could make out, the comments of the police reporter about covering the public security section of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department sounded pretty good. The guy looked to be forty years old, with gray curly hair and slumped shoulders—what the Japanese would call a "cat posture" kind of guy.

According to him, the public security section rarely made announcements and never, ever handed out press releases. Everything was said at the briefing, so if you didn't pay attention, you missed the story. This was not a place for adrenaline junkies (or

foreigners). Reporters sometimes spent an entire year without writing a single word. But when an arrest came down, it was always huge news, since it involved matters of national security.

The actual exam, or "military drill," as it was called, was scheduled for three days later, at the Yomiuri Vocational School of Engineering, located in the suburbs of Tokyo.

Not having read the corporate brochure, I was a little puzzled that a newspaper would also be running a vocational school. I was still unaware that *Yomiuri* was far from being just a newspaper; it was a vast conglomerate of companies ranging from the Yomiuriland amusement park to Yomiuri Ryoko, a travel agency, and the Yomiuri lodge in Kamakura, a traditional Japanese inn. The *Yomiuri* also has its own minihospital on the third floor of its corporate headquarters, sleeping quarters on the fourth floor, a cafeteria, a pharmacy, a bookstore, and an in-house massage therapist. The company-owned baseball team, the Yomiuri Giants, are often compared to the Yankees for their national popularity. With entertainment, vacations, health care, and sports, you could live your entire life in Japan without ever leaving the *Yomiuri* empire.

From the station, I followed the throngs of Japanese young people in navy blue suits and red ties, the classic "recruit look" of the day. In 1992, that also meant that all those who had followed the popular styles and dyed their hair brown or red had dyed it black again. There was a smattering of women in the female equivalent of sober navy blue suits.

I got to the vocational school fifteen minutes before test time and signed in. One staff person at the reception asked me, "Are you sure you're in the right place?"

"I'm sure," I answered humbly.

The exam was divided into four parts. The first was a test of the Japanese language; the second was foreign languages, where you had a choice of several; the third was a written essay; and the fourth was your chance to sell yourself as a potential employee.

I breezed through the first section and was done twenty minutes before everyone else. I sat there for some time, feeling quite proud of myself, until I nonchalantly flipped the exam over and noticed something that made my stomach lurch—there were also questions on *that* side of the page. I tried hard to finish, but I feared I'd blown the exam. When time was called, I turned in what I'd done (or not done). Furious at myself, I went back to my seat, prepared to forget the rest of the exam and go home.

I must have been sitting there blank-faced with shock when a *Yomiuri* man came up and tapped me on the shoulder. He had a Beatles bob, wore wire-rimmed glasses, and had a husky voice that didn't match his stature or appearance. (I would later know him as Endo-san of the human resources department, and he would die of complications from throat cancer a few years later.)

"I couldn't but help notice you among the applicants," he said to me in Japanese. "Why are you taking this test?"

"Well, I thought if I did well on it, it might help if I wanted a job on the English-language *Daily Yomiuri."*

"I took a quick look at your test. You did really well on the first questions. What happened to the rest?"

"It's very embarrassing. I didn't realize there were questions on both sides of the page until it was too late."

"Ahh. Let me make a note," he said as he pulled a little organizer out of his jacket pocket and scribbled in it.

He turned to me again. "Don't think about the *Daily Yomiuri*. It would be a waste. You should try for the real thing. You still have a chance to do well on this. You're a Sophia student, right?"

"Yes," I said.

"Thought so. Stick it out," he said, patting me on the shoulder.

• • •

So there I sat, inner debate raging. Give up and go home, or stick with it? I got up out of my seat and tossed my backpack over my shoulder. As I looked across the room, it seemed for a moment as if time had stopped. All the chatter faded out, people froze in midmovement, and I heard a high-pitched buzzing in my ears. In that instant, I knew that leaving or staying would be the biggest decision in my adult life. Somewhere in an alternative universe, I walked out. But not in this one.

I put my backpack on the table with a clunk and sat down. I pulled out my pencils, pulled in my chair, sat up straight, and got ready for round two. If I could attach a sound track to my life, I would have selected the James Bond theme right then. Admittedly, aligning one's pencils doesn't make for a great opening film montage, but it was the closest I'd ever come to heroic action.

The next section was foreign languages, and cleverly I picked English, where months spent doing boring translation and subtitling instructional kung fu videos paid off. Then I had to translate a passage on the Russian free economy from English into Japanese, followed by a brief passage on social progress in modern society from Japanese into English. I nailed both of them before the next ten-minute break.

Next was the essay. The theme was *gaikokujin*, or "foreigners," and after the first-round curse, I was beginning to feel blessed. This topic was something every foreigner is regularly asked about and, at Sophia, to write essays about.

Sometimes it's better to be lucky than good.

It turned out that although I had done abysmally on the Japanese-language section, I still ranked ninetieth out of one hundred applicants, meaning that my Japanese tested better than that of 10 percent of the Japanese applicants. I came in first in the foreign-language section—in both translating English into Japanese and translating Japanese into English. Actually, I lost points on the English translation, which doesn't say much for my mastery of the

English language. I got a C on my essay, more on content than on grammar. In total, on the first three parts of the test I had a score of 79 points out of a possible 100, making me fifty-ninth out of a hundred. Not glittering, but still I was called in for an interview. The only reason I can imagine was that someone cut me some slack for missing the back page of the Japanese-language test.

The first interview, held three weeks later, was blissfully brief. I had the chance to explain my screw-up, then was asked my expectations of the job and my willingness to work long hours. I stressed my willingness to work hard. They quizzed me about my knowledge of the *Yomiuri*, and I mentioned the series on Thai prostitutes and how impressed I had been by the in-depth coverage —which scored brownie points with the metro reporters at the session.

I was told there would be two more interviews, and then I heard nothing for weeks.

Now I was nervous. What had begun as a totally off-the-wall challenge was now in the realm of possibility. Every day I came home early and waited for the phone to ring. I read the newspaper religiously. I ramped up my Japanese studies. If I get this job, I thought, how will I survive? I started watching television in the hopes of improving my listening comprehension.

But one day, the frustration of living in limbo became strong enough to shove me out the door and into a bad horror flick at a Kabu-kicho movie theater.

On my way home from the film, I spotted a funny-looking tarot fortune-telling machine at the entrance of an arcade. In my uncertain state of mind, I figured it couldn't hurt to consult an expert.

I plunked 100 yen into the machine. The screen lit up and swirled around in a pink and green vortex. I picked the category "Jobs," my choice of fortune teller, "Madame Tantra," and plugged in my personal information. Madame Tantra, a very cute Japanese woman wearing a shawl, with a red mark on her forehead like a Hindu

priestess, appeared on the screen in a blaze of smoke and had me pick my cards. I rolled the crystal ball–shaped mouse around and clicked on the stacks of cards laid out on the virtual table.

The Final Verdict: King of Swords, Upright.

Success.

Keyword: Curiosity

> The job you are best suited for is as a copywriter or editor or something involving writing. For this kind of work, literary skills are necessary, also a certain amount of lowbrow nosiness (inquisitiveness). Because you have both attributes, you'll surely be able to make use of those skills. If you always keep your antenna out probing for information and nurture your morbid curiosity in a good way, FATE WILL BE ON YOUR SIDE.

I was thrilled. It seemed so dead-on that I kept the printout. Fortified with the good graces of Fortune, I took the last train home and checked my answering machine. There was a call from the *Yomiuri* asking me to attend a second round of interviews.

The second round consisted of a panel of three people. Two of the judges seemed enthused, but the third looked at me as if I were a fly on his sashimi. I had the feeling that I was a controversial candidate. After a number of queries, one of them asked me the following question, with great seriousness.

"You're Jewish, yes?"

"Yes, nominally."

"A lot of people in Japan believe that the Jews control the world economy. What do you think about that?"

I quickly replied, "Do you think that if the Jews really did control the world economy I'd be applying for a job as a newspaper reporter here? I know what the first-year salary is like."

I guess that was the right answer, because he chuckled and winked at me. There were no further questions.

I got up and was leaving when one of them stopped me. “Adelstein-san, there will be only one more round of interviews. If you are called in for that, you are pretty much in. We will be calling the final candidates on July 12. Be home. We won’t make more than one call.”

And so back to my small apartment on July 12, 1992, where I sat half in the refrigerator, one hand glued to the phone. My throat was parched, and I had the shakes. I felt as if I were waiting to get a last-minute date to prom night.

The call came at nine-thirty in the evening.

“Congratulations, Adelstein-san. You have been selected for the final round of interviews. Please come to the Yomiuri Building on July 31. Do you have any questions?”

I had none.

The last interview went very well. There were smiles all around and the atmosphere was very relaxed. There were no tough questions. One panelist began asking me a very complicated question about Japanese politics, but his Osaka dialect was so thick I had no idea what he was saying. I just played like a psychiatrist and repeated parts of his last sentence, with vague comments, such as, “Well, that’s one way of looking at the problem.” He seemed to interpret my response as total agreement and I didn’t bother to disabuse him.

There were two final questions:

“Can you work on the Sabbath?”

It wasn’t a problem.

“Can you eat sushi?”

Neither was that.

And with that, Matsuzaka-san, one of the senior human resources people, who looked remarkably Jewish for a Japanese guy, slapped

me on the back and said, “Congratulations. Consider yourself hired. The formal material will be sent to you in the mail.”

As he walked me out the door, he whispered conspiratorially in my ear, “I’m a Sophia graduate too. I heard good things about you from your teachers. It’s nice to have another Sophian on board.” Incredibly, my dumb luck had stayed with me throughout the whole process, even to the point of having a school connection on the hiring board.

I don’t know why the fates had been so kind, but I thought I should cover all the bases. On my way home, I stopped and added some coins to the pile in front of the Buddha in the gardens of the Nezu Museum.

I owed that Buddha some cash (borrowed subway fare) and I always liked to pay back my debts.

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* *Yomiuri* reporters as an entity are sometimes called the *Yomiuri-gun (Yomiuri* army), and the unassigned reporters in the *shakaibu* (national news/crime/metro unit) are the *yu-gun* (literally the “goof-off army,” but with the traditional meaning of “reserve corps”).

It's Not About Learning—It's About Unlearning

With six months to go before I was to start work, there was plenty of time for insecurities to grow. I couldn't shake the feeling that I had bitten off more than I could chew. I knew that I could handle the reading and writing parts of the job, but how would I handle interviewing people in Japanese?

The *Yomiuri* human resources guy in charge of recruits, the neo-Jewish Matsuzaka, was a little taken aback when I dropped into his office in October and asked for a preliminary internship so I could get a head start.

"I admire your desire to be prepared," he said. "But the truth is that we've never had anyone wanting to work before officially beginning. You're an unusual case, though, so I'll see what I can do." He took me to the third floor for a cup of coffee, handed me materials that are given to freshman reporters, and sent me on my way.

He called about two weeks later. He had arranged a mini-internship of about a week for me to spend in various offices. My first miniposting was to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department (TMPD) press club.

Matsuzaka met me in the lobby of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police headquarters, a gigantic labyrinth of a building that towered over all the others in the government district. It was the nerve center of the Tokyo police force, which was comprised of roughly forty thousand people. He was going to hand me over to Ansei Inoue, a legendary journalist and the author of *Thirty-three Years as a Police Reporter*. Inoue was the police beat captain and was loved, feared, and envied within the *Yomiuri* empire. His claim to fame was proving that a university professor convicted of murdering his wife

was innocent. He had not only exposed the missteps of the police machinery and the prosecution involved but also found the real murderer. The case became a classic example of how innocent people can be convicted when caught in the brutally efficient wheels of the Japanese justice system.

Inoue was about five feet eight and thin, with long, unkempt hair swept to the side of his face. He was wearing a gray suit, black tie, and scuffed shoes. His eyes were hidden behind brown-tinted glasses, which made them seem dull, but when he saw who I was, they sparkled. He seemed quite amused by the situation.

"So you're the gaijin I've been hearing about," he said animatedly. "You speak Japanese, right?" He aimed the question more at Matsuzaka than at me, but I answered anyway.

"I speak Japanese. Writing it is another issue."

Inoue laughed. "Well, you probably write it better than the people I have working for me. Let's go upstairs."

Technically, anyone visiting the TMPD without being a registered member of the press club or an actual employee or someone with security clearance was required to have a police escort before entering the building, but Inoue came and went as he pleased. It was still three years before the Aum Shinrikyo cult sprinkled sarin on the Tokyo subways, which had the effect of tightening security procedures all over the city.

In the elevator, Inoue gave me a breakdown of the police organization, but most of it went over my head. We got out at the ninth floor, which held the public affairs section of the TMPD and three press clubs: for the newspapers, television, and radio and local newspapers in the country. There was no space for the weekly or monthly magazines, which the police considered to be subversive scandal rags and kept off the official press club list.

There were no foreign media representatives either; the mainstream Japanese media outlets have not protested this lack of foreign media and never will. When you're part of a monopoly, it's not in your best interest to break yourself up.

Some reporters were hanging out playing cards on a battered desk in the open area near the kitchen. There was also a dank tatami room in the back where reporters could unroll futons and sleep off their hangovers while they waited for the next handout of news.

When Inoue and I walked into the *Yomiuri* section of the press club, which was essentially a cordoned-off rectangular room with a curtain for a door, all the reporters were gathered around a desk, poring over a photo book. I looked around. The space hardly fit my notion of the press accommodations for the biggest newspaper in Japan: the walls were covered with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves; newspapers and magazines were strewn across the couch and onto the floor; garbage cans overflowed with crumpled-up faxes, used containers of instant ramen, and beer cans. Each desk had a word processor. At the far end was a radiator/air conditioner, and on the deep windowsill there were six televisions and three video decks stacked high. All of the televisions were on. A CB radio tuned to the fire department frequency blared. In a bunk bed next to the "door," someone slept, still in his shoes, the day's morning edition covering his face.

Inoue and I walked over to the cluster of reporters; the book they were poring over was *Sex*, by Madonna, which had just been released, and the reporters (all of them male) were studying and commenting upon her breasts. Inoue made the introductions, then picked up the book and handed it to me: "Do you think this book is obscene?" It was the Japanese version, so a lot of the more graphic stuff (which meant genitals and pubic hair) had been obscured.

"No, not to me."

"Well, if they had published *this,"* Inoue went on, pulling the unexpurgated American edition off the shelf, "the police would have raided the publisher and confiscated every copy. The producers of *Santa Fe*[1*] barely escaped getting busted for showing a little pubic hair, but this stuff from America is damn close to porn. Maybe arty porn, but it's porn. We would have had a story if the Japanese publishers hadn't pussied out."

“The police would arrest someone for this?”

“The Supreme Court determined in 1957 that anything that sexually excites the viewer for no good reason, that violates the sense of propriety of the normal citizen, that is shameful, and that violates the sexual-moral conceptions of the general public, is obscene. By being obscene, such works are illegal and their distribution is a crime.”

“Which means?”

“Well, to the cops it means no pubic hair. Or it used to.” Inoue snickered. “It’s an odd thing about this country. The police don’t mind if you get a blow job in the middle of the day or if the operators of sex clubs advertise their services right out in the open, but they get their shorts all twisted up about people looking at people having sex. Pubic hair is too close to the real thing. The moral of the story: do it, but don’t watch it.”

“Is it legal to sell this stuff in the United States?” one reporter asked me.

That led us into a twenty-minute discussion of the differences between Japanese and U.S. porn. The reporters were shocked to learn that octopuses and other animals of the sea were rarely used to drape the genitals in American porn and that sex through panty hose wasn’t a popular theme. I was asked to bring back some videotapes on my next visit to America.

As we left the room, Inoue cautioned, “Don’t do it. Forget about bringing back any porn for those idiots. The last thing we need is for you to get seized at Customs. They’ll survive without it.”

He took me up to the coffee shop, ordered some green tea, and asked what I wanted to do at the *Yomiuri*.

“Well,” I said, “I’m interested in investigative journalism and the side of Japan I don’t know much about. The seamy side. The underworld.” I told him that my father was a country coroner and that crime and the police beat had always interested me.

He recommended I shoot for shakaibu, the national news section, which was responsible for the police beat. Inoue put it this way: “It’s the soul of the newspaper. Everything else is just flesh on the bones. Real journalism, journalism that can change the world, that’s what we do.”

I asked him for some advice as a reporter, and he was silent for a while. He smelled a little of sake when he began to speak, and I later learned he’d been drinking until five that morning. It was only nine now, and I don’t think he would’ve spoken as frankly if he’d been completely sober.

“Newspaper reporting isn’t rocket science,” he said. “The pattern is set. You remember the patterns and build from there. It’s like martial arts. You have *kata* [the form], which you memorize and repeat, and that’s how you learn the basic moves. It’s the same here. There are about three or four basic ways to write up a violent crime, so you have to be able to remember the style, fill in the blanks, and get the facts straight. The rest will come.”

Then he got more serious.

“There are eight rules of being a good reporter, Jake.

“One. Don’t ever burn your sources. If you can’t protect your sources, no one will trust you. All scoops are based on the understanding that you will protect the person who gave you the information. That’s the alpha and omega of reporting. Your source is your friend, your lover, your wife, and your soul. Betray your source, and you betray yourself. If you don’t protect your source, you’re not a journalist. You’re not even a man.

“Two. Finish a story as soon as possible. The life of news is short. Miss the chance, and the story is dead or the scoop is gone.

“Three. Never believe anyone. People lie, police lie, even your fellow reporters lie. Assume that you are being lied to, and proceed with caution.

“Four. Take any information you can get. People are good and bad. Information is not. Information is what it is, and it doesn’t

matter who gives it to you or where you steal it. The quality, the truth of the information, is what's important.

"Five. Remember and persist. Stories that people forget come back to haunt them. What may seem like an insignificant case can later turn into a major story. Keep paying attention to an unfolding investigation, and see where it goes. Don't let the constant flow of new news let you forget about the unfinished news.

"Six. Triangulate your stories, especially if they aren't an official announcement from the authorities. If you can verify information from three different sources, odds are good that the information is good.

"Seven. Write everything in a reverse pyramid. Editors cut from the bottom up. The important stuff goes on top, the trivial details go to the bottom. If you want your story to make it to the final edition, make it easy to cut.

"Eight. Never put your personal opinions into a story; let someone else do it for you. That's why experts and commentators exist. Objectivity is a subjective thing.

"And that's it."

It was shockingly frank advice from a man who had a reputation for being, well, sneaky. After all, Inoue had needed to play some serious hardball politics to make it to his position. He'd been a regional hire as opposed to a national hire. In the old days, regional hires were basically second-class citizens, flitting from local office to local office without ever spending more than a few years at the head office—which kept them from covering major news events and making a career in Tokyo. Inoue had bucked the system, somehow managing to push his way into national news and make a home in the Tokyo Metropolitan Police club.

Like any *Yomiuri* employee, he understood that for those who aspire to be investigative journalists, national news was the place to be. If getting there was hard, staying there was even harder. Within the paper it was said that national news reporters worked the longest, drank the most, got divorced most often, and died the

earliest. I don't know if those claims have ever been statistically validated, but almost all present and former national news reporters have a masochistic pride in their status.

After three days at the TMPD, I was sent to the Chiba office to spend two days working with other reporters. The Chiba bureau chief was a former national news reporter and a former TMPD beat captain; his name was Kaneko. The office was clean and modern, with two islands of desks, several fax machines mounted on shelves, and everything filed neatly in bookshelves in chronological order. It was Venus to the Mars of the TMPD press club.

Kaneko gave me a warm reception. He was especially interested in my Jewish background. We sat down on facing sofas in the corner of the office while he grilled me, finally getting to the question he really wanted answered: "Do you speak Hebrew?"

I didn't.

He seemed disappointed, so I asked him why he was interested.

"Well, I notice a lot of Israelis selling watches, jewelry, and brand-name goods—fake ones, of course—on the streets near the station," he said. "And I think they've got to be paying protection money to the yakuza."

I didn't really know much about the yakuza at this point. I knew they were gangsters and that they could be violent. But other than that I was oblivious—which, of course, would change.

He offered me a cigarette while he expounded. I accepted it, lit up, and tried not to cough.

"So, you being a gaijin," he went on, "maybe you could talk to them, find out. It would be interesting to see how much of a cut the yakuza are getting and how the deals are being worked out. What do you think?"

I said I'd be delighted—but it wouldn't be in Hebrew.

Kaneko called over a reporter named Hatsugai and assigned him as my editor. I was given a pen, a notepad, and a tape recorder and

sent out the door within thirty minutes of arriving at the office.

The street sellers were everywhere, especially near the station. Most of them appeared to be Israelis on a pan-Asian trip, selling items they had picked up in Nepal or Tibet. Some of them had fake brand-name watches and handbags they'd purchased in Thailand. I sat down at a Mister Donut across from one of the vendors and started my surveillance.

After two days and numerous doughnuts, I saw two Japanese men with white pants, loud print shirts, and tightly permed hair walking toward an Israeli vendor. They were clearly thugs. One of them was tall with a wide forehead, but he let the short guy lead the way. I left the doughnut shop and strolled casually by the scene.

They flanked both sides of his table, and I heard the short thug say four or five words to the Israeli; one of them was *shohadai*, a word I'd never come across before. Muttering in Hebrew, the vendor pulled out a wad of cash from his table drawer and handed it over. The short yakuza handed it to the tall yakuza, who brazenly counted it in wide-open sight before pocketing it and leaving the vendor to his sales.

I walked over to the Israeli and looked through his jewelry, clucking my head in sympathy. "I didn't know you had to pay rent to open up a street shop," I said.

The Israeli whipped back his ponytail and looked at me, a little suspiciously. After a moment he relaxed, pegging me as a fellow foreigner. "You do if you don't want the cops or those guys on your ass. They get thirty to thirty-five percent of whatever I make."

"Well, how do they know what you make?"

"They know," he said. "They look at what's out on the stand and what's not there when they come back. You can't bullshit them."

"Why don't you go to the police?"

"You must be fresh off the boat, brother. I'm on a tourist visa, so if I go to the police, I go to jail. The yakuza know it, and I know it. That's the cost of doing business here. No choice."

“Bummer,” I said. “I was thinking of doing this myself. Teaching English sucks.”

“It’s not bad money,” he said. “Maybe one hundred thousand yen [about a thousand U.S. dollars] on the weekend. It’s good business here but better in Yokohama, I hear.”

I offered him some doughnuts and hung around listening to his adventures in Thailand. About thirty minutes later another Israeli showed up in a van with his Japanese girlfriend and started unloading merchandise.

Vendor number one introduced me. Vendor number two was named Easy, and he wasted no time complaining about the gangsters in a thick Israeli accent: “The fookers! I hate them. The more we make, the more they take. I want to give them nothing. But Keiko,” he said, pointing at his girlfriend, “she says that would be bad news.”

Keiko nodded. Asking first if I spoke Japanese, she proceeded to chat: “Do you know the Sumiyoshi-kai?”

Even I had heard of the Sumiyoshi-kai. They were one of the largest yakuza factions operating in Tokyo and generally not to be messed with. Clearly he was doing the only thing he could to maintain his business.

As we went on talking, Easy started to look annoyed, so I stopped with the *nihongo* (Japanese) and spoke in English about the weather with the two vendors, then made my way back to the office.

When I told him what I had learned, Kaneko did not hide his pleasure, and I was pleased for it in turn.

“What does *shohadai* mean?” I asked.

“It’s slang for ‘rent.’ *Basho* means ‘place,’ and *dai* means ‘money.’ Instead of ‘bashodai,’ the yakuza say ‘shobadai.’ They like to twist words around so that straight citizens don’t understand them. It’s standard lingo—a term used to shake down street merchants.”

Then Kaneko told me, “Write the article.”

Right away, I was being led into deep water. The angle was that yakuza were preying on foreign street vendors who couldn't complain to the police and that this was a new form of revenue for organized crime. I tried my best, but I suspect I did a lousy job. I didn't know much about the anti–organized crime legislation that was new to the country, and I didn't have any police connections to add depth to the story. It was like Journalism 102.

Hatsugai looked over the article. "Not bad," he said politely. "It's a good starting point. I'll talk to the Chiba police and see what they think. We'll put it together and try for the local edition."

When I came in the next Monday, Kaneko greeted me excitedly. "Adelstein," he said, "great news! It's a slow news day, so your article is going to make the national edition. The evening news!"

He assured me that for a regional bureau reporter, getting a "scoop" to run in the national edition was a major accomplishment. He was almost as excited as I suddenly was.

The headline read, "Organized Crime Targeting Non-Japanese Street Vendors. Yakuza Find New Way to Squeeze Out 'Rent' by Taking Advantage of Illegal Workers (Who Can't Seek Police Protection)." Somehow there was enough of a universal element to warrant it being national news, at least that day. No byline, of course—rarely did even a seasoned reporter get one, so who was I to complain?

All in all, it was a respectable piece of journalism, and Inoue called to congratulate me the same morning. I'd made the national edition with a scoop, and I wasn't even an official hire!

Feeling a bit more self-confident, I decided to take some time off to travel before entering the salaryman life. The *Yomiuri* had a system that allowed new hires to take an interest-free loan from the company and travel overseas before starting work. It was a benevolent perk and one that effectively made you an indentured servant, but I took advantage of it to plan a few months in Hong Kong to study the Chinese martial *art wing chun*, which had been an interest of mine for a long time. But soon the *Yomiuri* called with

bad news: it hadn't been able to take care of my visa. I was told to come back and take care of it immediately. If I didn't, my job would be all but lost.

The old immigration office was literally three minutes away from the main office of the *Yomiuri*. It was a poorly lit, crumbly old building, and the first two floors were always teeming with disgruntled foreigners. I had received a postcard to show up for an interview and had to wait more than an hour. While waiting, I auditioned as a human jungle gym for two little half-Filipino, half-Japanese toddlers who were running amok in the waiting area while their mother and her manager argued with a clerk about her visa. The youngest kid, about five, was hanging from my nose by his fingers when I got called in. I pried his fingers out and walked to the room in the back.

My interviewer was an old bureaucrat with lots of gold teeth and gray hair slicked over to the side with some kind of pomade. He wanted to conduct the interview in English, and I humored him.

"You will work for *The Daily Yomiuri*[2*] from next April?"

"No, I'll work for the Yomiuri *Yomiuri* from this April."

"Yomiuri *Yomiuri?"*

"Yes, Yomiuri *Yomiuri*. The one that's in Japanese."

"You are photographer, then."

"No, I will be a reporter."

"Reporter? You write in Japanese?"

"Yes, that's why it's the Yomiuri *Yomiuri*, not the *Daily Yomiuri."*

"Yomiuri *Yomiuri?"*

"Yes."

"If you write in Japanese, is that international work or local work?"

"I don't know. You're the immigration guy."

"Oh. You have contract?"

“No contract. I’ll be a regular employee. *Seisha-in.*”[†]

“Seisha-in? And you are not Japanese?”

“Not to my knowledge.”

“Then you need a contract.”

“I don’t have a contract. I’m a seisha-in. Seisha-in don’t get contracts; they get hired for life.”

He scratched his head and inhaled air through his teeth. “I think you should go get contract. You get contract and then come back.”

“When?”

“When you have contract.”

“Well, who do I talk to then?”

That perturbed him. He seemed to realize that he might actually have to take personal responsibility for my visa application. I could see his eyes darting up to the left as he tried to think of someone else to hand me over to before, reluctantly, giving me his card.

“You can call me.”

I walked out of Immigration very confused and a little pissed. I’d earned the Japanese dream—full employee status in a huge corporation. I didn’t want some contract hanging over my head like the sword of Damocles. I wanted the works: the lifetime employment, the company health plan, the prestigious business card, a never-ending job, *and* a better visa.

I went to the *Yomiuri* reception desk at headquarters and asked for someone in human resources. One of the section’s bigwigs personally came down to meet me. I explained the situation and why I wasn’t thrilled about the idea of having a “contract” with the company. I expected him to mutter something bureaucratic like “Well, it just can’t be helped” and to be put in limbo while I waited for a contract to be hastily drawn up.

Instead, without even blinking, he looked at me and said, “That is the stupidest thing I have ever heard. We have hired you as a regular employee, and that is your status. None of your colleagues is

being given a contract, and you should not be treated any differently."

He took the immigration guy's business card from me and told me to go home. "I'll handle this," he said.

The next morning, as I was eating a bowl of Morinaga chocolate flakes, I got a call from Immigration. The young woman on the phone asked me if two in the afternoon would be a convenient time to come by to finish up the paperwork. I was a little taken aback. In more than five years of living in Japan, I never had Immigration ask me about "my convenience." I didn't push my luck. Yes, two would be fine.

When I showed up that afternoon and walked into the waiting room, I was immediately escorted to Mr. Gold Teeth's office. He stood up when I entered.

"My apologies for the confusion. Yours is an unusual case. Did you bring your passport?"

I handed it to him. He came back in five minutes with a three-year visa allowing me to work under the international affairs and humanities category of employment. Wishing me good luck, he nervously hustled me out the door.

I don't know whether it took a threatening phone call or was just a matter of procedure, but I was impressed. It was my first encounter with the power behind the *Yomiuri*.

That April 1, all sixty rookies were sworn in as *Yomiuri* employees at a ceremony conducted at company headquarters. The president of the company spoke; our names were read out; pictures were taken. I'd already met many of the newbies at preemployment events, including a softball game we had played at Tokyo Dome, the home of the Yomiuri Giants.

After the ceremony, Matsuzaka, the Sophia graduate who had lobbied for my hiring, took me out for drinks. At this point in my career, I still didn't drink alcohol. We went to a little shot bar in Ginza, John Coltrane on the loudspeakers buried in the ceiling, marble tables and jiggers lined up so shiny that the low lights

sparkled off them. It was a classy place and not the usual dive that *Yomiuri* reporters tend to gravitate to.

I ordered a Coke and began spouting about how much I was looking forward to being assigned to an office and "learning the trade."

Matsuzaka cut me off with a wave of his hand. "It's not about learning. It's about unlearning. It's about cutting off ties, cutting out things, getting rid of preconceptions, losing everything you thought you knew. That's the first thing you'll learn. If you want to be an excellent reporter, you have to amputate your past life. You have to let go of your pride, your free time, your hobbies, your preferences, and your opinions.

"If you have a girlfriend, she'll be gone as soon as you're not around, and you won't be around a lot. You have to let go of your pride, because everything you think you know is wrong.

"You have to act friendly to people you won't like politically, socially, and ethically. You have to pay deference to the senior reporters. You have to not judge people but learn to judge the value of the information they give you. You have to cut down on your sleeping hours, your exercise time, and your time to read books. Your life will boil down to reading the paper, drinking with your sources, watching the news, checking to see if you've been scooped, and meeting deadlines. You will be flooded with work that seems meaningless and stupid, but you'll do it anyway.

"You learn to let go of what you want to be the truth and find out what is the truth, and you report it as it is, not as you wish it was. It's an important job. Journalists are the one thing in this country that keeps the forces in power in check. They're the final guardians of this fragile democracy we have in Japan.

"Let go of your preconceptions, dignity, and pride and get the job done. If you can do that, you can learn to be a great reporter."

He said it all without pausing in a very quiet, even-paced monologue. It was clear to me that he'd been thinking about this a long time.

But he wasn't finished.

"Remember this. You have to be careful, or you will lose everything that is important to you and you will lose yourself. It's a tough balancing act. Sometimes people end up losing everything for the job and gaining nothing from it. This company will take care of you as long as you are useful, and unless you commit a criminal act, you will never be fired. That's great job security. However, as a reporter, you are an expendable commodity. When you have outlived your usefulness, you won't be a reporter anymore. You'll be doing something else. A reporter has a short half-life in this company. Enjoy it while it lasts. Simplify, cut down on things you don't need, but be sure to leave something behind worth having."

After that, he abruptly changed the subject to baseball—a sport, despite my American heritage, that I knew nothing about.

It wasn't the first time I would be surprised by how serious *Yomiuri* people were about the calling of journalism. The Japanese press is often characterized by the foreign media as a bunch of sycophantic lap-dog office workers, but this isn't exactly the case.

I was still taking in Matsuzaka's words while pretending to understand the finer points of America's pastime, when we were joined by a young female reporter whose hiring he had also supported a few years ago. She was upset because she'd come up from a regional office only to be assigned to do layout for a few months. Matsuzaka explained to her that it was part of the process everyone had to go through before getting on the reporter roster in the big leagues. It was an initiation ritual.

Then he sent us both home in the same hired car. The *Yomiuri* has its own fleet of cars used to escort reporters to interviews, press conferences, and sometimes their homes. As I was getting into the car, Matsuzaka tapped me on the shoulder.

"Jake, you're going to be assigned to the Urawa office," he said. "It's a tough gig. The office has a Spartan atmosphere, and it's in the heart of Saitama. It's a good thing because you'll have chances to

write for the national edition and you will be doing a lot of writing. You will be extremely busy."

"Urawa? Really? Is that close to Tokyo?"

"Very close. But once you're there, Tokyo will be on the other side of the planet. Urawa keeps its people very busy, but remember what I told you. Don't quit. We have high hopes for you."

• • •

While we rode home, I told Matsuzaka's protégé that I'd been assigned to Urawa. Her response was *"Goshushosama desu."* It's the phrase used at funerals to express your condolences.

Saitama is a large, half-rural, half-suburban prefecture just outside Tokyo, and Urawa is a giant bedroom city from which tired workers commute to the capital.

Saitama. A place considered so uncool by urban Japanese that it had spawned its own adjective, *dasai*, meaning "not hip, boring, unfashionable."

In other words, I'd been assigned to the New Jersey of Japan.

1* *Santa Fe* was a book of nude photos of the popular actress Rie Miyazawa published before *Sex*. The publication of *Santa Fe* was significant because it showed pubic hair. The "artistic qualities" of the work earned a tacit approval from the authorities, cracking open the door to the more relaxed policy of today.

2* *The Daily Yomiuri* is an English-language edition of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* with some original reporting. Most of the content comes from articles selected to be translated from the Japanese version of the *Yomiuri*. A number of foreign journalists and foreign correspondents in Tokyo got their start working there, and it has some great original writing. On the other hand, many Japanese staffers consider being put there a form of demotion, torture, and punishment or a trial of passage to a better position in the international news department.

† *A seisha-in* is a full-fledged employee. In 1993, that meant employment for life. Once hired, you were never fired. Lifetime employment in Japan has always been a bit of a

myth, but in the nineties several major corporations implicitly offered that kind of hiring.

All Right, Punks, Grab Your Notebooks

The reputation of the Urawa office preceded it. An article by a former reporter assigned there had appeared in *Tsukuru* magazine, a journal for the media trade, and it had been scathing. *"Yomiuri Shinbun:* My Three Months of Disillusionment" was the title, but if that didn't get the point across, there was the subtitle: "Disillusion, Desperation, Suffering, and Finally a Decision."

The exposé documented the endless trivial tasks the author had been forced to perform 24/7. It told of abuse by an editor who went ballistic upon encountering the use of a kanji not on the approved list for the paper, cursing out the young reporter and throwing a sandal at his head. It told of the stench of sake permeating the office at six each evening, when the editor declared the workday over and always opened a bottle.

I would come to view my own first year at the paper as a partial validation of the article. I say "partial" because I don't think the author really understood the full picture, which is: the first year of life as a reporter in Japan is an elaborate hazing, punctuated by a little on-the-job training. If you survive that, things get a little better. If you're lucky, you get your own fresh slaves to boss around and begin to discover the fundamentals of journalism.

The *Yomiuri* had only recently decided to shore up the ranks of the Urawa office. Part of the reason was that our sworn enemy, the *Asahi*, had put its Urawa office under the auspices of its shakaibu (metro/national news). It meant that while our office could draw only upon the meager resources of the regional bureau, the *Asahi* office could call up an army of a hundred reporters to be sent to

Saitama for a big story. The *Asahi* was kicking *Yomiuri's* ass, and the powers that be had decided to even the odds.

There were four rookies who were to be cannon fodder in the battle of Urawa: Tsuji, Kouchi, Yoshihara, and myself. In Japanese company life, the people you enter the company with, and especially the people who go with you on the first posting, become the closest thing you will ever have to a family. The fact that you are *doki*, which translates, literally, as "of the same period of time," creates a strange but important bond that continues as long as you are in the company and often even after you leave. It's comparable to the brotherhood ceremony for young yakuza, where sake cups are exchanged: a bond is created that will never break.

I was extremely lucky. I had taken an instant liking to my future comrades when we first met at the *Yomiuri* swearing-in ceremony—and they seemed to like me back.

Jun Yoshihara was twenty-two, two years younger than I, and looked like a pop idol. He was a graduate of Waseda University's commerce department. (This is rare; though many Waseda grads enter the mass media, usually they're from the journalism department.) He was tall, in good shape from playing soccer, and so pasty-faced that he looked Caucasian. For a short time we called him The Face, and that's how I still think of him.

Naoki Tsuji, "Frenchie," was twenty-five, also a graduate of Waseda, also not from the journalism department but from French literature. Of the four of us, he was the most intelligent. He was also always immaculately coiffed, wore tailored suits, and was constantly reading some obscure Japanese novel or French masterpiece. He radiated sensitivity and good breeding.

Of course, everything I've just described made him a terrible match for the *Yomiuri* and was probably why he became the subject of harassment by the older reporters, who found his very existence to be annoying. It's likely that he would have flourished at the *Asahi*, but you never really know. In many ways it was like a cum laude of the Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism taking a job *at*

The Washington Times. Today he is a successful writer, with four novels to his name.

Yasushi Kouchi was nicknamed "Chappy," though I can't remember why. He was twenty-four and had a degree in international relations from Tsukuba University. He was prematurely balding, which made him look older than he was, and had an extremely round face, making him appear Chinese (from a Japanese perspective). He was one of the most dependable people I have ever known, and his quick thinking saved me a number of times.

We were an odd crew: The Face, Chappy, the Frenchman, and the Gaijin. But from day one we covered one another's asses. There's not much more you can ask or expect from your friends or colleagues at any workplace. And in my case, I found myself relying on their good graces very, very soon, when a minor incident could have ended my career prematurely.

It was the night before we were to report to the office for our first official day on the job. A welcome party was held at a local *izakaya* pub, and even though I had a horrendous cold, I showed up. It would have been worse if I hadn't.

The whole staff was there: Hara, the station chief with the physique of a sumo wrestler, a laugh that was deep and jolly, an Italian suit, and a Rolex. He had a punch perm of sorts, glasses perched precariously on the nub of his nose, and hair that curled around his ears, making him look vaguely Hasidic.

Ono, a reporter on loan to the Urawa office, was head of the team of prefectural police reporters, which made him the direct supervisor of us recruits. He was built like a smaller version of Hara, with eyes that looked as if they were slits cut into a pumpkin. Ono took great pride in being a shakaibu reporter, and within five minutes he had made it clear that he was not just an ordinary regional reporter; he wasn't going to be stuck here in the boonies forever.

Hayashi and Saito, the two editors. The latter had a regional dialect so thick you thought he was missing some teeth; he could be very supportive when sober. The former was short and sensitive about it, and famous for being a hard-driving, hard-drinking tyrant. Luckily for us, he was a happy drunk most of the time.

Shimizu, the computer keyboarder, who had a mustache, yellow teeth, and no hair on the top of his head; apparently an indispensable fixture of the office.

Yamamoto, number two to Ono on the police beat and the man who would prove to be my mentor and sometimes tormenter. Yamamoto was my university *senpaí*—that is, senior to my sophomore. His features looked almost Mongolian, and for some reason he reminded me of a porcupine. Then there was Nakajima, his sidekick, who was hair-challenged, like Chappy, and had a long Ichabod Crane face. He'd been a science major in college and fit the classic image of the classic scientist: cold, analytical, dry. Unlike the classic image of the classic scientist, however, he was dressed better than anyone else.

Finally Hojo, the bureau photographer, whose nose was so red, with so many broken blood vessels, he could have been Irish. By virtue of his seniority, he could say anything to anyone without fear of incrimination, and this night he did.

We rookies were made to stand at the table in the back of the pub and introduce ourselves. Ono was the first to fill our cups with sake, and we then spent the rest of the night filling his in the Japanese way, saying *kanpai* ("cheers") with every pour. The inferiors pour the sake of the superiors. Occasionally the superiors reciprocate.

Ono and Hara told war stories, and I, in my cold-ridden, befuddled state, tried to keep track of the conversation as best I could. Even on a good day, my listening skills were still wanting, but I didn't want anyone to know that. Hara raised his glass for a toast.

The sake wasn't helping my congestion, though. In the middle of Hara's toast, a giant sneeze suddenly made its way through my

passages and exploded before I could raise my hands to cover up. Out of my nose flew a giant ball of snot, slicing through the air with a whoosh, winging The Face and Chappy before splattering its target —the unsuspecting Hara, my first boss and holder of my future.

There was a sudden, horrific silence, which seemed to last forever.

Then Chappy whacked me on the head with a newspaper. “Jake, you are such a barbarian!” he howled. Yoshihara bonked me too. That broke the ice, and everybody laughed, including Hara, who wiped his glasses with the *oshibori* napkin The Face quickly handed him. I bowed profusely in apology. Hojo joined the lineup, hitting me right in the head with his wet oshibori. “Do you know how to use this, idiot?” he said.

What could have been a terribly awkward situation had turned into a joke in a matter of seconds. Even Ono was amused.

“Omae,” he began, using the second rudest form of “you” in Japanese, “you are one ballsy gaijin. Omae, I’ve never seen anyone do that before and live to tell the tale.”

I continued to bow and apologize, but Ono just swept his hand through the air as if it was already nothing. He poured more sake in my cup and told me to drink up.

Shimizu dragged us all to his favorite hostess club afterward, and I passed out listening to Ono belting out some karaoke. Then someone put me into a car and sent me home.

My new apartment was a small flat above a traditional tea and confectionary shop, a five-minute bicycle ride from the Urawa office. In 1993, many places would still not rent to foreigners, but the company had found it for me and signed on as my guarantor. The wonderful thing about the flat was the shower/bath unit that came with it. In my five years as a college student in Japan, I had never lived in an apartment with its own bath; I had to go to either the public bath or the coin shower down the street. Five minutes of hot water for 100 yen in the coin shower, 300 yen for the public bath.

As I soaked my aching body in my very own *furo* that night, praying that the hangover would be mild, I felt great! I'd really moved up in the world. I had a job, had survived a potentially fatal sneeze, and had my own bathtub. What more could a man possibly want?

The next day, April 15, 1993, at 8:30 in the morning, I showed up at the Urawa office of the *Yomiuri Shinbun* and sat down in the lobby along with the rest of the new guys. Compared to the pristine Chiba office, this was, to put it subtly, a bit of a comedown. Chappy breathed deeply and said, "This is a rat hole. I was hoping for something a little snazzier." Frenchie said, "Sure doesn't look like the typical newspaper office in the company pamphlet." The Face said he'd heard of worse.

The office consumed most of the second floor of an office building in a residential neighborhood. The bureau chief had his own office with a door. The rest of the office was all open space, no cubicles, no privacy. The reception area near the window wasn't the most welcoming place. There were three faux leather sofas surrounding one long table overflowing with newspapers, hiding the reams of magazines piled underneath. The blinds over the window were covered with a nicotine glaze that, like flypaper, had trapped everything from dust to particles of food to, oh yeah, insects.

There were two large islands of desks. The two editors had the desks near the middle of the room. The senior reporters had the three desks in the back and the luxury of a sofa jammed against the wall. There was a darkroom and, next to it, a tatami-mat room where the night staffers slept. (It came complete with a shower/bath and a desk stuffed with porn in the lower drawers.) The editors would take naps there, but it was off limits to the other reporters while the sun shone. As for the four new guys, their desks were in the middle of the room, where they were most vulnerable.

Almost every desk had a multibutton phone but no computer (too early in history for that). There was a modified network station

where stories were typed in and sent to the head office for final review. We sent our stories over the phones to the terminal, and Shimizu retyped and formatted them. It was pretty inefficient.

Ono showed up around nine, bleary-eyed and cranky, appearing to have slept in the suit he had been wearing the night before. He stood in front of the reception table and glared at us.

"Who the hell told you you could sit down here!" he yelled.

We immediately stood up.

He laughed and told us to sit down. Nakajima then handed us a copy of the police reporter manual, version 1.1, titled *A Day in the Life of the Police Reporter;* a beeper, which would forever be clasped to our hips and which had to always be on; and, finally, a set of documents—collections of articles under such categories as Robbery, Homicide, Assault, Arson, Drugs, Organized Crime, Bid Rigging, Traffic Accidents, and Purse Snatching. Yes, purse snatching. In 1993, serial purse snatching was still enough of a newsworthy item to merit its own reporting style; sometimes, apparently, it was good enough to command the lead story for the local edition.

"These are examples of the types of stories you will be covering as police reporters," Nakajima explained. "Study the articles and remember the style. I'll expect you to know it within a week. You have everything you need now to write an article. Now it's about getting to work."

That was the beginning and the end of our formal training as police reporters.

The next item on the agenda was an explanation of our daily duties other than reporting. When we came to the office in the evening, for example, we were expected to take dinner orders from the senior staff. And when we ended up on the night shift, we were required to update the scrapbooks.

The scrapbook rules were incredibly complicated. There were instructions on where to write the date of an article, how to write which edition of the paper it came from, where to file, where to

multiple-file, and how to note national editions and front-page articles. The manual for handling the scrapbook was considerably longer than the one for covering the police beat.

We were also introduced to other duties, including writing mini-biographies for a section known as “The Little King of Our House” in the free local paper distributed by the *Yomiuri* as a civic service. Essentially, these were birth announcements. And so that we had the broadest exposure to all manner of news, we were expected to write up the results of local sports events, compile statistics, and report weather forecasts. Each of these, needless to say, required a different style of recording and writing and inputting.

We were then given a calendar for the month, indicating when and who had early duty, late duty, overnight duty, and sports coverage. Some of the senior staff had little squares with diagonal lines noted for certain days. I asked what they were.

“Vacation days,” answered Nakajima.

“But there’re no such diagonal lines for us,” I said.

“That’s because you have no vacation days,” he said.

Around 1 P.M., we were getting an intensive course in typing sports records into the computer when there was a call from the police press club. A man had been found stabbed to death in a station wagon in Tsurugashima. The Saitama prefectural police had made the announcement, and it looked as if they were going to set up a Homicide Special Investigation Unit.

Ono was visibly excited. “All right, punks, grab your notepads. Take your cameras, and let’s go.” Murder was always big news in Saitama, just as it is anywhere in Japan. It says a great deal about the safety of the country that a murder, any murder, is national news. There are exceptions, however, and that’s when the victim is Chinese, a yakuza, a homeless person, or a nonwhite foreigner. Then the news value drops 50 percent.

Ono explained the protocol. “We’re going to do *kikikomi* [crime scene and related interviews] at the site of the murder and at the company of the deceased. Your job is to find out anything about him—who he was, when he was last seen, who might have wanted to kill him—and to get a photo. And bring back a head shot; I don’t care where you get it from, just get it. If you find anything interesting, call it in to the reporter in the police press club or the Urawa office. Now go.”

We went. New employees were forbidden from driving a car for the first six months, so two of us went with Yamamoto and other reporters, and two of us grabbed a taxi from a company that had a contract with the *Yomiuri*.

Tsurugashima was a long way from Urawa. The Nishi Irima police were handling the initial investigation. Investigative Division One (homicide, violent crimes) from the SPP headquarters was dispatching the division chief. When I arrived at the crime scene, Yamamoto brought me up to speed:

Around 11 P.M. the night before, Ryu Machida, aged forty-one, had been found dead by his wife in a station wagon parked in the middle of a heavy industrial area. He was lying in the backseat, stabbed in the left breast. He had apparently bled to death. Machida had last been seen three days earlier, when he had gone to work. He hadn’t returned home, and his family had filed a missing persons report with the local police, asking for a formal search for him on the fourteenth.

It was still cold for April. I was thrilled to be out in the field, armed with my official *Yomiuri* business card and armband. The crime scene, though, proved to be elusive. The police had cordoned off a large area around the car with yellow tape that read KEEP OUT. The surrounding area was almost empty of human life. I dutifully walked around knocking on doors, trying to find someone who might have seen something. Most of the time people were stunned into silence, seeing my white face, and if they ever recovered, it was only to say, blankly, no.

The Face and Chappy weren't having any luck either.

At a car parts factory, I introduced myself to an older employee as "Jake Adelstein from the *Yomiuri Shinbun."* I got what was turning out to be the usual reception: "I don't need any."

"I'm not selling anything."

"I already have a newspaper subscription."

"I'm not selling newspapers. I'm a reporter for the *Yomiuri."*

"A reporter?"

"Yes, a reporter." I handed him my business card.

"Hmmm." He read the card over three times. "You're a gaijin, right?"

"Yes. I'm a gaijin reporter working for the *Yomiuri."*

"So why are you here?"

• • •

This process was repeated endlessly, as everyone's immediate assumption was that I was a newspaper boy. One middle-aged man who answered the door wearing a sweatsuit even complained about his morning paper not being delivered on time.

So I changed tactics. "Hello," I began, "I'm a *reporter* for the *Yomiuri Shinbun* working on a story. Here is my card. I apologize for being a foreigner and taking your time, but I'd like to ask some questions."

It sped up the process, but the results were still nada. The same for my colleagues, so we were sent to the company where the victim had worked, joining the mob of reporters from other media. When we got there, it was just after closing time and workers were filing out of the building. They must have been instructed not to speak to the press, because we were met with a wall of silence.

I strolled around back to see if I could improve my luck. I encountered a man in green overalls loading a truck. I greeted him,

and he didn't bat an eye at my non-Japanese face. Did he think anyone would have had reason to bump off his colleague? I asked.

"Well, he was having an affair with a coworker," he said. "Everyone knew that. So I figure it could have been his wife or maybe the mistress. You want the name?"

Of course I wanted the name. I tried to write it down, but I sucked at writing Japanese names. There are so many variant readings and kanji for names that it's often a nightmare even for Japanese.

He finally took the notepad out of my hands and wrote the name down for me. I thanked him profusely, but he just waved his hand.

"You didn't hear it from me, and I never talked to you."

"Understood."

"Yoshiyama, the mistress, hasn't been to work in a couple days. End of story."

Could it be this easy? I called Yamamoto from a public phone. I was so excited that I was unintelligible. Yamamoto made me slow down and give him the information in detail. He told me to grab Yoshihara and work with him.

We started calling every Yoshiyama in the phone book. Yoshihara finally found the right Yoshiyama, but, according to her husband, she couldn't come to the phone because she was talking to the police. Bingo!

Our next order was to make our way to the Nishi Iruma police station for the press conference. The local satellite-office reporter, Kanda, was already there, speaking to the vice captain. Freshman reporters from the *Asahi* and the Saitama local newspaper mulled around, but the largest cluster of people was near the coffee vending machine.

Kanda had already gotten his can of coffee. Kanda was a veteran reporter, diligent and aggressive. He wore steel-rimmed glasses that covered most of his face and had long, greasy, stringy bangs that hung over his glasses like a sheepdog's. He called me over to the desk of the vice captain and introduced us. We exchanged

pleasantries, and then Kanda pulled me over to the corner. He congratulated me on my work but warned me to keep my mouth shut at the press conference.

“If you ask anything important at a press conference, you ruin your own scoop. You ask only for details about things everybody already knows, not details about things you only half know. Just watch and listen.”

The press conference was held in a meeting room on the second floor. The television crews were pushing their way around, and people placed their tape recorders on the podium where the homicide chief would be speaking.

When he did speak, it was brief and straight from his notes: “It looks like the victim, Machida, was killed a few days ago, probably on the night he vanished. The long-bladed knife appears to have pierced the heart, killing him instantly. The official cause of death is loss of blood.

“The victim appears to have been killed in the car, judging from the blood splatter. We are talking to his friends and employers to develop any leads. We have officially set up a special investigation headquarters; we’ll come up with a name for it later tonight.

“That’s all we have for now. Questions?”

Hands did not immediately go up. The general consensus seemed to be not to ask real questions at the official press conference but to lob the zingers at the police after the conference, at their homes, or on their way out the door. Still, people felt obligated to ask something.

“According to your earlier reports, the wife found the body. How did she find it?”

“She was searching the area with a friend when she saw the family car. The body was in it.” I myself took that as a broad hint.

“When did the police receive notification that Machida was missing?”

“Two days after he’d gone missing.”

“Why did they wait so long?” It was an *Asahi* reporter, arching his eyebrows.

The detective didn’t take the bait. “Well, how long are you supposed to wait? If you don’t get home tonight before two in the morning, is your wife going to file a report with us?”

“My wife? Absolutely.”

That got some laughs. The rest of the conference was benign, and the group dispersed.

Eventually we headed back to Urawa and compared notes. When Yamamoto returned at around three in the morning from the police chief’s home, where he’d gone for information, he corroborated the the details we’d put together. The woman who had “helped” Mrs. Machida discover the body of her husband was the same Yoshiyama who had allegedly been having an affair with him. Naturally, the police considered her the main suspect.

The next day was fruitless, spent polling the neighborhood. We were able to confirm that the police were interrogating Yoshiyama but she was refusing to break. On the morning of the next day, though, she confessed to her husband, who called the Saitama police, who made the arrest just in time for us to make the evening edition with the news.

It went something like this:

Yoshiyama was a part-time employee at the same company where Machida worked. The two had been having an affair since the spring of the previous year, and Machida was trying to break it off.

On the twelfth, after work, they met at a nearby park before going for a drive, which lasted three hours. Around nine P.M., Machida parked the car near their workplace, where the two of them argued. Yoshiyama then stabbed him in the chest with a mountain knife, killing him almost instantly. She claimed that Machida had wanted to end the relationship and his own life and she had just complied.

Yoshiyama was socially acquainted with Mrs. Machida, so she had volunteered to help Mrs. Machida search for her husband. The police had yet to find the weapon, but they did

find a can of juice in the car with Yoshiyama's fingerprints on it. In September 1994, she was sentenced to eight years of hard labor.

It was not a particularly exciting case, one I'm sure has long passed from the memory of the police and even the reporters who covered the story. I did get some brownie points for getting a lead on the killer so early in the game. Of course, it was more luck than skill, but I learned an important lesson: journalism is always about the results, not the effort.

Blackmail, a Budding Reporter's Best Friend

After a few months as a police beat reporter, I had become friends with several cops, but I still didn't have a single, solitary scoop that I had dug up on my own.

Getting scoops was difficult. It involved getting wind of a breaking story, finding the detective in the lower ranks who was working the story, gaining his trust and the information he had, then running it up the food chain in such a way that the people at the top didn't know you were culling data from the bottom.

You might spend hours waiting for your source to come home, hoping that he'd cough up a morsel of information in your brief chat with him. On a big case, your source might not come home for days. In 1993, contact was more difficult since most people didn't have cell phones, meaning you had to rely on luck to catch them at work, at home, or somewhere in between.

You had to get third-party verification that you had all the facts, *and* you had to convince your editor that it was safe to run a story with no official press release to hide behind. Sometimes you needed to visit the home of the suspect to confirm that he or she had been arrested, since in Japan arrest records are not publicly available. Often, when you were ready to write the story and gave notice to the chief of detectives, the police would immediately rush out a press release, reducing your scoop—and all your efforts—to nothing.

But I did finally score. How? The old-fashioned way: blackmail.

Every evening between the usual tedious typing of sports records, birth announcements, and obituaries and taking dinner orders for the senior staff, I would get on my bicycle, pedal over to the Omiya police station, and hang out with the cops. Most of the time, if they weren't busy, I would sit down and shoot the shit with them for a

while. We'd drink green tea and discuss politics, past cases, or what was on the television. I'd bring doughnuts, which I don't think were part of the typical diet of the cops in Japan, but they didn't seem to mind. In fact, they might have liked them for that reason.

One of my sources who was assigned to the railroads told me about a professional pickpocket they'd nabbed a few weeks back who had confessed to a supposedly huge number of cases. What caught my attention was that the pickpocket would "go to work" every day in suit and tie; he was a true professional. Variations of this story repeatedly show up in the Japanese news, but it sounded interesting to me then because I didn't know any better.

After triangulating the lead, I was ready to write the article. I had all the facts I needed—except for the number of crimes he'd confessed to, which the story was riding on. The railroad officials didn't know. My only choice was to talk to someone high up in the Omiya police, since they were handling the case now.

The chief of detectives was named Fuji. He was known as a great interrogator and a great cop but an unpleasant person to deal with if you were a reporter. He was tall and thin, with stereotypical thick glasses, and he always wore suits that were wrinkled and gray. His face had the proverbial five o'clock shadow by ten in the morning.

I don't think he liked or disliked me. He just considered me a nuisance, another pesky little reporter who would eventually be replaced by another rookie, preferably one who was Japanese. I decided to take the leap and ask him to let me write the story, but he would not budge.

"If you think you know so much, go ahead, write the story. But I bet you don't know how many pockets he picked before we caught him. Ten? One hundred? Two hundred?"

"It's over a hundred, then?"

"You don't know, do you?"

"No."

“Well, then, I guess this isn’t your story. Why don’t you just wait a week, and you’ll get all the details.”

“You mean you’ll give me the scoop?”

“Nope,” he said. “We’ll announce the case in a week and you can ask all the questions you want.”

“But then it won’t be a scoop.”

“That’s not my problem. I just do the paperwork, the detectives do the investigation, and when we have all the facts together, we announce it. You write it up. Case closed.”

He called over one of the policewomen and pointed at me. “Could you get Adelstein-san a cup of tea? He’s working very hard, and he looks dehydrated.” He left me sitting and sipping at his desk and went downstairs to talk to the vice captain, probably to warn him that I was nosing around.

If I were a cop, I’d feel the same way about me. My scooping the story wouldn’t benefit him in any way. I didn’t have the position or authority to promise him good coverage of the story, nor did I have information to offer him that would make it a give-and-take deal. On the other hand, what harm could it do to give me the story? I was working hard. The story would make the police look good in the local community or, at the very least, not make them look bad.

I had a week before the announcement. The cops loved to make us wait. It was a constant tug-of-war. So I found myself once again whittling away the hours, drinking tea and watching television with the Omiya cops at nine that same evening. That was when I happened to notice a drawing posted on the bulletin board. It was a composite sketch of a thief who had been ripping off large electronics and clothing stores along a major highway of the city. The notice, sometimes called a *tehaisho*, went into great detail about his physical characteristics, his MO, and each store he’d robbed.

“Hey, do you mind if I take a picture of the police station?” I casually asked a cop whose mouth was full of jelly doughnut. “My dad’s a medical examiner in Missouri, and he’s really curious to see what a Japanese police station looks like.”

The guys were sufficiently impressed by my father's quasi-police status to ask me about his work while they posed for pictures. I had them stand beside the bulletin board, and as I snapped away, I took a close-up of the composite sketch.

I got back to the office at eleven, ate some cold pizza left in the refrigerator, and developed the film. (This was still in the dark ages of film, when developing photos was a big pain in the ass.) I blew up the notice, cropped it, made bad copies of it, crumpled them up, and took the most ratty version home with me. My purpose was to make it look as if I'd either gotten a copy from one of the victims or a local merchant or fished it out of the trash. I didn't want anyone figuring out that I'd photographed it while hanging around the police station. Not only could that curtail my access to the police, it could also get my doughnut friends chewed out.

The next day I went to one of the stores, talked to the manager about the crime, and asked him if he knew of any similar cases. He showed me his copy of the police notice but wouldn't give it to me. Around two in the afternoon, I walked into the Omiya police station and asked permission to go up and see Fuji.

Fuji motioned for me to sit down and planted his elbows on his desk, forming his fingers into a temple and peering over them with some amusement.

"How's the big story coming along?" he asked.

"I've given up on that one," I said.

"Given up?"

"Yes, I've got a better one. I'm going to write a public interest piece about the recent rash of roadside robberies in the Omiya area. I think I'll include this composite drawing as well."

I showed him the copy but didn't hand it to him.

"Where'd you get that?" he sputtered.

"I've already talked to some of the victims." It wasn't an answer and it wasn't a lie, but it was misdirection.

Fuji wasn't amused. "We're in the middle of that investigation right now. If you publish that, you'll scare him off and we'll never catch him."

"That's not my problem," I said. "My job is to gather the news, write it, and publish it as soon as possible for the good of the community. I *can* write that you're investigating, if you like. I promise."

"Don't write that story."

"I'm a reporter. I *have* to write things. That's my job. Just like you investigate things and catch criminals for a living, I investigate things, and they're published in the newspaper. If I'm not writing, I'm not working, and I don't have anything better to write right now."

Fuji's eyes narrowed behind the thick glass. "I could give you something better to write about. Maybe something better than a little public service announcement about unsolved crimes."

"Like what?"

"I'll give you stuff on the pickpocket that none of the other papers has."

"That would be nice, but I'm only interested if it's a total, hands-down, noncompetitive exclusive." I was feeling cocky.

"We don't do that. If we give you the exclusive, all the other reporters who cover this police station are going to come in here whining about unfair treatment."

"Let them whine. I have to tell my boss in thirty minutes what I'm turning in for the morning edition. Right now, this serial thief thing is all I've got."

"Hold on," he said. "Give me thirty minutes." He motioned the policewoman over. She brought over a cup of green tea and was about to set it before me when Fuji motioned her to stop. "Would you like coffee instead?"

"No, no, green tea is fine."

"But you prefer coffee, right?"

“Well …”

Fuji nodded at her.

“Cream or sugar?” she asked.

“Both, please.”

“Okay, wait here,” Fuji said, stepping away and heading downstairs.

The coffee was terrible, instant stuff, but it was better than the green tea.

Fuji returned twenty minutes later. “All right. Meet me at the dojo training hall tomorrow at noon. I’ll tell you everything you want to know about the pickpocket. Think of all the questions you want to ask beforehand, because I’m only doing this once.” And that was that.

That evening in the press club I told Yamamoto about the deal I’d made. He was pleased but pissed off at the same time.

“You blackmailed the chief detective for that story?”

“I didn’t blackmail him. I exchanged one story for another.”

“You blackmailed him.”

“Did I make threats?”

“Well, no.”

“Okay, then it’s not blackmail.”

“Adelstein, you’re a real piece of work. You have balls. And you’re sneaky too.”

“Did I do something wrong?”

“For all that, you should have gotten a better story out of him, that’s what. A lousy pickpocket was the best you could do?”

“There wasn’t anything else I wanted.”

“All right,” he said. “Get the story, type it up, and I’ll try to get the desk editor to give it scoop treatment.”

When I got to the training hall the next day, Fuji was inside waiting, sitting cross-legged on the tatami with a sheaf of papers in his lap. I took off my shoes, stepped onto the tatami, and sat across from him in the formal *seiza* position, knees together and feet tucked under my ass.

Fuji took off his glasses, put them down beside his knees, and looked me over. I took out my notepad and pen.

"Adelstein."

"Yes, Fuji-san."

"Your socks don't match."

I looked down. It was true. I had on one gray sock and one black sock. I hadn't planned on being shoeless. "I'm sorry. I was in a rush this morning."

Fuji shook his head. "You're a strange one. I thought you were clueless, but you actually seem to know what you're doing. Then again, you can't even match your own socks."

"This is true."

"In the eight years I have been a detective, I have never given a reporter a scoop."

"I am honored to be the first."

"And the last. You are to tell no one I told you about this case. If people ask you how you got the scoop, what are you going to say?"

"I'm not sure anyone will care."

"Oh, they will. I know your kind."

"My kind?"

"Reporters. So what will you say?"

I thought for a moment. "I'll say that someone leaked the story out of headquarters to my boss and I was forced to write it up because it was on my beat."

"Excellent answer."

Fuji then outlined the sequence of events leading up to the arrest of the pickpocket, the interesting angles to the story, the pickpocket's date of birth, and the number of cases he'd confessed to. He then patiently answered all my other questions.

He never gave me another scoop in the entire time I covered the Omiya police. He did, however, continue to ask me whether I wanted green tea or coffee whenever I went to chat with him.

The story came out in late September in "The News Inside and Out," a feature section of the local *Yomiuri*. Since it was a feature, I actually got a byline.

In the annals of crime, the story of the professional pickpocket is a minor thing, but I'm going to relate it here as an example of the professionalism of Japanese criminals.

Kosuke Sato, 45, was arrested by Omiya police in the act of picking someone's pocket on a train. It's a hard bust to make, for unless a pickpocket is caught in the act, it's hard to prove in court. The standard defense is that the accused "found the wallet and was going to take it to the police as soon as it was possible." Intent is hard to disprove.

By his own account, Sato had, in the space of less than a year, committed 420 thefts. He might have committed more, but he apparently didn't keep perfect records.

He lived in a small fishing village in Niigata Prefecture. He would be away weekdays; he told his wife he was helping a friend run a bar in Tokyo. He would come home on the weekends, pay the bills, and give his wife what amounted to about a thousand dollars a week.

He would leave his house in a suit and tie, then get on a train to Tokyo, Osaka, or one of ten other prefectures. During the day, to pass the time he would play pachinko or sleep at a sauna. At night he would board whatever train struck his fancy—usually a late-night express train—and ply his craft. He'd look for salarymen drunk and passed out. What made his job easy is that many Japanese feel safe enough to sleep on trains.

He'd sit next to his target and, using a briefcase to conceal his actions, would lift the mark's wallet. He'd take out the cash, not touch anything else, and return the wallet to the owner, all without waking the poor bastard up. But buranko, *removing a wallet from a suit jacket hanging from a hook next to his seat, was his specialty. His skill in this, he claimed,*

was unmatched. He could pull the wallet out of a suit jacket regardless of whether the train was empty or full, whether a potential witness was sitting next to him or across from him. He was of course good at picking a pocket while pretending to be asleep.

Everything in Japan, even theft, is an art. Even assault is an art—judo, aikido, and kendo, all of these are more than just learning to decimate your opponent, they're about learning to master yourself. In many ways, Sato was a master of his art.

Personally, I wish I'd spent a little more time mastering the martial arts in college; I'd find that surviving as a *Yomiuri* reporter was a little more physically demanding than I'd anticipated.

It's the New Year, Let's Fight

The end of the old year and the beginning of the new are monumentally important events in Japan. On New Year's Eve, thousands of Japanese flock to Buddhist temples to hear the tolling of the bells called *joya no kane*. The temple's big bronze bell is tolled 108 times, one for each cardinal sin in the Buddhist universe. It's believed that hearing the bells purifies you of your sins and allows you to start the new year fresh and clean.

If at all possible, I go to the bell ringing each year, since it never hurts to be on the safe side. A few temples now have Web sites that let you ring the bell virtually, which I've tried; it's not the same.

After the temple bells are rung, huge throngs of people make pilgrimages to Shinto shrines to pray for good fortune in the upcoming year. No one works for three, four, or, depending on the calendar, five days; many people return to their hometowns, and the streets of the business and government districts grow quiet and deserted.

Before any of this happens, however, the most important ceremony in company life takes place. Usually held in the first half of December, the *bonenkai* is a "forget-the-year party," and in many cases, given the amount of alcohol consumed, it is not an idle threat. Everyone—employees and bosses—is supposed to let his hair down and have a good time. For the *Yomiuri's* Urawa office this has traditionally meant getting into a drunken brawl. My first bonenkai was no exception.

It was held at a local izakaya with the usual menu: fish (raw and cooked), yakitori, tofu, pickles, rice balls, and, since Urawa was famous for catfish, catfish tempura. Generally speaking, the

Japanese don't eat catfish (the flavor isn't subtle), but I was happy to see something on my plate that reminded me of home.

The first act went reasonably well. All the freshmen were requested to do some kind of entertainment. Someone did card tricks, someone twisted balloons into animals. I managed to push a 500-yen coin up my nose, which was considered an incredible feat. It was at the party after the party where things got weird.

We left the restaurant and were heading toward a hostess club when Kimura, the right-wing, emperor-worshipping head of the Kumagaya branch office, seemed to get wound up. Kimura was a short, stocky fellow with a tight-permed hairstyle reminiscent of the yakuza from my internship story. When he was sober, he was a great guy. He was a mean drunk, however, and he'd been putting it away all night. He kept picking on me as we entered the next izakaya, and once we were sitting down, he looked over at me and sneered. "I look at you, Adelstein, and I can't figure out how we lost the war. How could we lose to a bunch of sloppy Americans? Barbarians with no discipline, no culture, and no honor. It beats me. Long live the Emperor! *Tenno ni banzai!"*

In my five-plus years in Japan as a college student, I don't think I'd personally met any nationalists. I knew they existed. I knew that Yukio Mishima, one of Japan's major writers, was a bodybuilder, gay, and a nationalist. I'd seen the right-wing groups driving their black vans around town, blaring imperial marching music from loudspeakers. But I didn't really know how to deal with Kimura. What was I supposed to say? "Sorry we won the war"?

I make it a rule never to argue with drunks, so I just kept nodding and saying noncommittal, typically Japanese things like "That's certainly one way of looking at it" or "Maybe that's how it happened."

In the early 1990s, historical revisionists and emperor-worshipping guys like Kimura were generally regarded as lovable kooks whom no one took seriously. At the time that Kimura was carrying on, I didn't take him seriously either.

Yoshihara and Chappy managed to pull my ass out of the fire by switching seats with me a couple of times, but Kimura kept following me around like a pit bull chasing a squirrel. As we stumbled to a hostess bar, Kimura tapped me on the shoulder.

“I read in the company newsletter that you do wing chun. That’s like some kind of Chinese martial art, right?”

“Right.”

“Do you know *shorinji kempo?”*

“Yes, that’s the Japanese martial art started by Doshin So. It’s a really interesting fighting style.”

“It’s the best fighting style in the world. It’s a Japanese martial art.”

“I’m sure it’s a great martial art. I prefer wing chun; it just suits me better.”

“Shorinji kempo is the best.”

I turned my back on him and started walking toward our next stop with Yamamoto. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw Kimura launch a roundhouse kick at me.

As a martial artist, I generally suck. Wing chun, my choosen disipline at the time, is the martial art famous for the one-inch punch, a short-distance impact strike using the bottom two knuckles of the hand for the final impact. After years of wing chun, there were only three things that I could do correctly. The short-distance punch was one of them.

Without thinking, I turned and blocked the kick and punched him full in the chest, knocking him on his back. It was an extremely lucky punch. It was like hitting the sweet spot on a tennis ball; there was a pleasant *thwack* on impact, and Kimura actually lifted off the ground for a nanosecond.

For an older guy, Kimura was pretty lithe. He sprang up and grabbed me, putting my head in an armlock and wrestling me to the ground. Meanwhile, everyone in our group came rushing over to watch the excitement. Shorinji kempo has some great joint holds,

but by relaxing into Kimura's lock, I was able to get out of it, and I returned Kimura's favor by gouging him in the larynx. While he was choking, I rolled up on top of him and in a drunken fury was getting ready to palm-heel his nose into pulp when Odanaka, a senior reporter and a generally lovable roly-poly kind of guy, pulled me off Kimura. He asked *me* if I was okay and brushed the dirt off my clothes.

Kimura was holding his hand to his throat and was about to lunge for me when a couple of other reporters restrained him. He was yelling obscenities.

"Hey, you threw the first kick!" Odanaka screamed at him. "What are you complaining about? You're supposed to set an example." Odanaka was one of the few guys who would stand up for the younger reporters. It took guts to scold a senior reporter in the *Yomiuri* hierarchy.

At that point, Saito walked into the fray and jabbed Odanaka with his index finger. "Why don't you shut up. Let 'em fight it out. This is good stuff." He laughed as he motioned for the other reporters to let go of Kimura, who was now foaming at the mouth.

"What kind of boss are you?" Odanaka yelled at Saito. "You can't let senior staff pick on the freshmen! You should be lecturing Kimura. You're such an asshole—you little dwarf."

At those words, Saito took a swing at Odanaka, and Odanaka responded by almost popping him in the jaw. Now the crowd had divided into four groups: one to restrain Kimura, one to restrain Saito, one to protect me, and another one to keep Odanaka from punching Saito into a bloody mass.

I ended up walking home with Yamamoto and a couple of other reporters. We stopped at a fast-food restaurant, Yoshinoya, for a bowl of rice topped with beef. I was a little worried that maybe I'd lost my job.

Yamamoto assured me that that was not the case. "Hey, that's what bonenkai are all about. Tomorrow, everyone will have forgotten. Well, not really, but nobody will talk about it, so you

shouldn't either. By the way, nice punch. If you could write articles as well as you fight, you wouldn't be such a pain in the ass."

He was right. The next day it was as if the night before had never happened. I never discussed it with Kimura, and we got along better than we had before. He started to call me Jake-kun affectionately, and I made sure never to discuss politics with him.

I thought my year would end on a quiet note, until December 29, when Yamamoto and I were the only ones in the Saitama police press club. He was reading comic books on the sofa, and I was typing up an article on aloe plants blooming in the winter. Over the fire department radio band we heard of a fire spreading in Kawaguchi, so I hopped into a taxi and went to the scene.

By the time I got there, the fire had been contained. I was taking notes when I heard over the CB in the fire truck that there was another fire just seconds from where we now were. As the firemen rushed to their trucks, I ran ahead to the park where the fire was supposed to be happening.

As I turned the corner at the entrance to the park, I almost bumped into a walking tower of flame in human form. I got so close that my eyebrows were singed. The figure walked in a circle around a seesaw in a slow, robotlike fashion while people from the neighborhood tossed buckets of water on him and sprayed him with extinguishers. A group of children gathered in a circle around him, watching the whole proceedings with fascination. I got a faceful of fire-retardant foam in the confusion before the man collapsed in a ball on the ground in a fetal position. The area smelled like kerosene, burned hot dogs, and hoisin sauce.

The man was still breathing. You could hear him wheeze, see his chest move. He took five more breaths, and then he died.

For a second there was total silence. Even the kids were quiet. You could hear the hum of traffic from a few streets away and the crackling of skin and nothing else. Then everyone started talking about what to do.

The firemen showed up two minutes later. One of the medics tried to find a pulse but singed his hand on the body, yelping in pain. Another medic brought out a stethoscope and put it where you would guess his chest had been. He pronounced the man dead on the spot and draped a blue tarp over the body. The police hadn't arrived yet.

I called the office and let them know where I was, then started asking people in the crowd what had happened. The three elementary school children who had watched the entire thing brought me up to speed. The man, dressed in a blue work suit, had ridden into the park on his bicycle with a red plastic canister of kerosene in the basket. He had stopped, poured the kerosene over his head, and taken out a box of matches. He had had trouble lighting one, since they were soaked in kerosene, but had finally found a dry one, picked up a rock, and lit it off that. The moment he touched his chest, he burst into flames.

The kids tried to describe the sound but got into an argument as to whether it sounded like firecrackers or more like a *pachi-pachi* sound. They used the word to describe a man on fire, *hi-daruma (hi* means "fire," and *daruma* refers to the legless, armless Buddhist icon). They didn't seem fazed or shocked by the self-immolation in the least. For them, it was just an interesting incident.

I talked to one of the firemen on the scene.

"It's a shame," he said. "We see a lot of these things around this time of the year. People who don't want to face the new year. Makes for a busy holiday, for us anyway."

"Seems like a painful way to go."

"Nah, not usually, since you lose consciousness. But if you don't die immediately, it's a terrible way to go. You just linger on in excruciating pain while your body gets infected, and then you die of your own toxicity. So his timing was good."

He hauled the corpse into the back of an ambulance and wished me a happy new year.

I went off to the local police station to get the official details.

The victim was Hikoki Harasawa, age forty-eight, birthday on January 5. Not only was he facing a new year, he was looking at another birthday as well. He lived about five minutes from the park. His neighbors said he'd lost his job when a car parts factory closed down; he'd been jobless for months. It was still hard for me to imagine that a man would light himself on fire just for this. Later, when I began investigating yakuza loan-sharking schemes, I discovered what had probably put him over the edge: serious debt to seriously dangerous people.

I called Yamamoto at the press club.

He had one question: "Is the guy famous?"

I said he wasn't.

"Then drop it," Yamamoto said.

I went back to Urawa and picked up a gift for Ono, the big boss. He'd just had his first child, so we'd made a gag T-shirt with the image of his face in a WANTED poster with the crime of fathering children without a license. I took the T-shirt and my gift to his apartment.

Ono was tickled with the gifts and asked me to stay a bit. His wife brought us a couple of Budweisers. After a sip, Ono screwed up his face. "Do you like this American beer? This was on sale, so I thought I'd try it. It tastes terrible!"

"Yes, it tastes terrible," I laughed. "Piss and ashes. That's how we described it in Missouri."

"Piss and ashes! Nice. I like that. It's exactly what this tastes like."

We poured the beer into the potted plant, opened two cans of Asahi beer, and chatted amicably. It was good to be alive and well in Japan.

The Perfect Manual of Suicide

The Japanese believe there's a right way to live, to love, to induce female orgasm, to chop off your pinkie, to take off your shoes, to swing a bat, to write an article about homicide, to die—even to kill yourself. There's a right way—a perfect way—to do everything.

The reverence for "the way"—the ideography is the *tao* of Chinese philosophy—is an integral part of Japanese society, a society that loves manuals, loves doing things by the book, literally. In ancient times, before the advent of mass-market publishing, manuals were written on scrolls. The people believed that *kotodama*—the soul or spirit of language—resided in every word; that in uttering a thought one gives life to it; that words hold a spiritual power. This belief gave the written and spoken language a near-mystical status and encouraged a reverence for the written word beyond that in the West.

Today the Japanese obsession with manuals is unabated. A few years ago, the term *manual ningen* ("manual humans") was in vogue to describe a generation of younger Japanese who seemed incapable of independent thought. The term is now part of the vernacular, used for someone who can only follow instructions and can't think outside the box. A synonym for *manual ningen* is *shijimachi ningen* ("the waiting-for-instructions people"), which, as you can imagine, refers to passive employees with no initiative.

I have never found a really good translation for *manual ningen*, so I prefer to use "manualoid" when discussing this trend in English. It's not as great a made-up word as "truthiness," but I like it.

It's not uncommon for books labeled as manuals to spend weeks on the best-seller rankings. Amazon Japan (www.amazon.co.jp) listed 9,994 manuals on its Web site at the time I first wrote this

chapter, and both the sales rankings and the books themselves are a microcosm of Japanese society.

The number one–selling book was a manual for how to argue with Koreans (whether in Japan or South Korea—I can't speak for North Korea) who don't have nice things to say about Japan. Koreans keep moaning about the fact that Japan invaded Korea, enslaved their people, raped their women, forbade their language and culture, performed biological experiments on POWs, and kidnapped thousands of Koreans, shipping them off to Japan to work in sweatshops of industry. The thrust of the book is this: Tell those miserable Koreans to stop exaggerating and shut up.

The book has had one unexpected side effect: by disdaining Koreans' complaints, it actually touches upon Japan's less-than-noble history with Korea, which is something the Ministry of Education has worked hard to keep out of the public school system. Apparently, not knowing history means never having to say you're sorry.

Number two on the best-seller list, *Kabu no zeikin,* was a manual for preparing your tax returns if you own or sell stocks. The popularity of this title, one assumes, is indicative of the significant flow of cash into and out of the Japanese stock market.

Number three was a manual for aspiring landlords. When land is scarce and housing is expensive, becoming a landlord is the high road to fortune and luxury. Japan, however, has very strong tenant rights embedded in the law that have been known to gum up the works. I assume that's where the manual comes in, to keep that cash flowing. It was also a sign that the decadelong real estate slump might be coming to an end.

Number four was the perennially listed *Perfect Manual of Suicide*. The title is self-explanatory, to be taken literally. More on that later.

Number five: *The Manual of Superorgasmic Fellatio and Cunnilingus —with over 400 Photos*. I'm not making this one up. The Japanese are very sexually driven and they're perfectionists, so this book fills an important niche, and it's available almost anywhere in Japan.

I've even seen it on the shelves of a 7-Eleven and a mom-and-pop bookstore in central Tokyo—not far, as a matter of fact, from the U.S. Embassy in Toranomon. That this book sells so well should tell you a little about the Japanese attitude toward sex and sexuality: enthusiastic, accepting, condoning, clinical, and earnest. And from the targeting of the book, it's clear that both men and women are interested in improving their technique or, at the very least, using textbooks to supplement the oral tradition. The book itself is very well researched and not without some practical value.

Number six was *The Advanced Cardiac Life Support Provider Manual* by the American Heart Association, translated into Japanese. My guess is that a lot of people buying number five are also buying number six.

Number seven was *Sex: A Foreplay Manual*. The fact that this book is number seven instead of number five suggests that most Japanese already have the basics of sexual intercourse down before they go book shopping.

Number eight was a book for engineers wanting to pass a really difficult test. Just the title gives me a headache, so I won't even mention it here. I'll be brief and just point out that there are lots of Japanese into learning and making a living doing really technical, brainy kinds of stuff.

Number nine: *The Sought-After Guy (How to Get Chicks): A Manual of 40 [Techniques]—What Women, in Their Heart of Hearts, Really Want from Men*. Originally published in 2003, with a price tag of 500 yen, this manual is a proven long and big seller, although it is now on sale for half price. You might think it's odd that books about giving women better orgasms sell more than books about getting women in the first place—a case, perhaps, of putting the cart before the horse. Note, however, that numbers five and seven are aimed at men and women both, which explains the ranking. But maybe it doesn't.

Number ten: *The Indispensable Manual for the National Center Test for University Admissions*. In Japan, the college you get into

determines the rest of your natural life. Graduating from college isn't usually so critical, although dropping out will tip the balance. If you can pass the entrance exams for a reputable university, 90 percent of the battle for good employment is won. Therefore, the most important rite of passage most Japanese have in their lives is taking this test; the fact that this manual isn't higher on the list reflects the gentrification of Japan and the sharp decline in the birthrate. It may also reflect the general stupidification (made-up word) of Japanese youths. If the title were revised to, say, *The Indispensable Manga Manual for the National Center Test for University Admissions*, sales of this self-improvement tome could go through the roof.

So those were the big ten sellers about three years ago: three involve sex, two involve life and death. Not bad for balance.

My second year on the job, I got a firsthand look at one of these manuals in action. A message came in on my beeper to call Takagi, the medical examiner for the Urawa homicide squad.

"Hey, Jake, you want to see something really weird?"

"Absolutely."

"No pictures."

"Okay."

"No names either."

"No names?"

"It's a kid. Juvenile. So no names. You know the drill."

He gave me the address and told me to get there fast. "The homicide guys aren't here yet, but if they see your big-nosed gaijin face at the scene, we're both going to be in deep shit."

"Gotcha."

Generally speaking, one rarely gets to visit a crime scene in Japan. The police radio broadcasts went digital early in the nineties, which made it impossible for us to listen to the police scanners.

Unless you had someone in the communication department on your side, there was a several-hour delay between the time the police arrived at the scene and the time they informed the press that a crime had taken place. Usually by the time we got to a crime scene, the police had cordoned off a huge area with that familiar yellow tape.

I'm not sure why Takagi called me. It could have been my winning personality, or it could have been the tickets I'd gotten him to a Yomiuri Giants baseball game. It was probably the tickets.

Takagi and I had a good working relationship. He was assigned to the Violent Crime Division of the Urawa Police Department. He'd had a little medical training, which apparently qualified him to do simple, on-the-spot medical examiner work. He also had a voice as raspy as sandpaper from smoking Peace cigarettes at a machine-gun pace from morning until dusk.

I pulled up to the appointed soon-to-be-designated crime scene exactly fifteen minutes later. It was a five-story apartment building: a typical nondescript condominium complex, clothes hanging out to dry on the balconies. Takagi greeted me perfunctorily and took me up to the fourth floor. He led me down the hall and opened the metal door of the apartment at issue.

I was met with a faint salty smell and what I can only describe as the aroma of hot dogs combined with burned chocolate chip cookies. The living room was packed with boxes, as if someone had just moved in or was in the process of moving out.

Takagi led me to the back bedroom, which looked as if it belonged to an adolescent male: posters on the wall of Japanese teen idols with bad teeth, *manga* stacked up in the corner, instant ramen packs on the floor. The kid was lying on the top of a bunk bed, facing the wall, his naked back toward us.

I don't know what I was thinking, but I was about to tap the kid on his shoulder when Takagi stuck out his foot and tripped me.

"What the—?"

“You’re not paying attention, Jake-san. You almost got yourself killed. You can read Japanese. Take a look, you idiot.”

With his arm on my shoulder, he led me closer to the kid, and upon closer inspection I saw, attached to the kid’s back, a piece of paper with small writing that said, “Do not touch me, please. Imminent danger of electrocution.” I leaned over and saw wires taped to his chest and nipples that ran along the wall and down directly to the electrical outlet.

My mouth must have been hanging wide open. Takagi laughed at my shock. “You have to be careful, Jake-san.”

“What happened?”

“This happened,” Takagi said, picking up a book from the desk next the bed. It was *The Perfect Manual of Suicide*. “He’d studied up on electrocution, followed the instructions perfectly. Here, I’ll hold it, you read it. Just keep your hands off it.”

According to the manual, electrocution was painless, pretty much. Only a prick of pain when the first shock hits, but immediately you stop breathing, your heart short-circuits, and in seconds you’ll be dead. A clean death. There is very little damage to the body, so it’s possible to hold an open-casket funeral. The author pointed out that very few people actually choose to kill themselves this way, but self-electrocution is cheap and painless and fast; if you want to die, it deserves reevaluation.

“You should write about this,” Takagi said to me. “We aren’t going to announce the kid’s suicide, but I think this book should be written up. It is an evil book. Parents should know about it, and if they see this book in their kid’s room, they should be worried. It doesn’t just aid suicide, it encourages it.”

“Why’d he kill himself?”

“His family just moved here from Osaka. Maybe someone made fun of his accent. Maybe he didn’t want to move. Who knows? He didn’t leave a note—just the warning label on his back.”

“That was thoughtful, actually.”

"It's a damn shame. But that warning *was* thoughtful—and polite too. He even said 'please.' And he did it without making some horrible mess. I've seen a lot of teen suicides, and some kids have absolutely no consideration for their family."

I wrote the article that day. I had some reservations about writing it. In a way, I felt as if I were promoting the book, but making more people aware of its insidious nature was probably a good thing.

Aside from killing oneself, improving one's sex life, or increasing one's finances, how else are manuals integral to everyday Japanese life? Well, remember, the first thing I was handed when I started as a police reporter was a manual: *A Day in the Life of the Police Reporter*.

The police reporter manual is a riveting read, to be sure, but allow me to sketch out the Japanese police system in simple, de facto terms. The way the Japanese police system is supposed to be and the way it really works are two different things.

Police in Japan are organized in pyramidal fashion. At the top is the National Public Security Council, which is under the prime minister's cabinet. Under the National Public Security Council is the National Police Agency.

The NPA is a political and administrative bureaucracy that does no investigation on its own but may coordinate investigations crossing prefectural lines. It gives general guidance to all police organizations in Japan. Think of the FBI with all of the bureaucracy and none of the investigative powers, and you have a good sense of what the National Police Agency is like. Many who rise to the top of the NPA signed up after passing a national exam and had little or no real police experience before being put on the career fast track.

Below the NPA are the forty-seven prefectural police bureaus that investigate crimes in their region. The most prestigious of these is the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, which functions a little like the FBI in that it often takes on cases more national than local in nature.

Each prefectural police department governs local police stations and neighborhood outposts called *koban*. The NPA appoints its own bureaucrats to high administrative posts in local police headquarters, ensuring the NPA's grasp on power while also ensuring that no one who knows the turf and is truly competent to run a large police organization is actually ever appointed to the job. The local police do all the nitty-gritty police work, investigations, and traffic control.

Each police station usually consists of the following divisions: violent crime, fraud, white-collar crime, traffic, juvenile crime, crime prevention, and lifestyle crime (including vice), plus an organized crime control division. Drugs, credit card fraud, and the flesh trade fall under organized crime (or anti–organized crime, I should say) in some prefectures, but the turf has not yet been delineated clearly.

In most major cases, the detectives from police headquarters take charge and the detectives at the local police station function as subordinates, doing the footwork, driving the limousine for the chief of homicide, buying *bento* box lunches for the senior detectives, and generally functioning at the whim and will of the *honbu* (headquarters). When the TMPD works a joint investigation with other prefectural police, the TMPD functions like the honbu and expects everyone else to function like low-ranking police station minions.

Even within a news organization covering the police beat, there is a hierarchy. In Tokyo, the TMPD press club reporters handle the headquarters detectives and announcements; the district reporters handle assigned areas of Tokyo.

As a cub police reporter, your job is to make friends with low-level detectives and pick up an interesting case before headquarters gets its teeth into it. If you're really good, you can get a scoop from the bottom of the food chain. This usually means getting knowledge of an arrest before it's officially announced.

The police make regular announcements of cases, written out in short press releases, which the reporter is expected to augment by asking questions over the telephone or by actually going to the crime scene himself.

Each major case is announced in advance, and a lecture is given in addition to a flimsy press release. This takes place in what is called a press club, which is housed in the actual building of each prefectural police headquarters. Large police stations may also have a pressroom.

But, of course, not any old reporter has entrance to these press clubs.

What you won't see in a reporter's manual is how to get along with the cops, which is probably the most important thing on the police beat. I once heard the job of a police reporter characterized as being a "male geisha." That's actually a fair approximation of what was necessary to get a story—at least for some of us. "Male prostitute" might also be another way of putting it, but I don't think it accurately captures the subtleties of the task involved. Some heavy entertaining is involved, but there's a little more foreplay than a quick getting off "up against the wall." Personally, I prefer to gather my own data and bargain with the police rather than beg for a tidbit, but that was simply my style. I was just as guilty of being a male geisha as most of my peers, except sometimes I managed to put myself into a better bargaining position: on top.

The following is a memo that a former supervisor once wrote to us reporters on the police beat. It offers great insight into the amount of schmoozing and massaging involved in our job. I will say that the guy who wrote it is an excellent reporter who is willing to do real work to get a story rather than rely on the kindness of cops he'd done favors for. Be that as it may, the man is also a brownnoser without equal.

A Memo to Whom It May Concern:

It's really sad that I have to write the ABCs of being a police reporter down for you losers. It may have been ten years since I was last on the crime beat, but let me say this: The TMPD Club team is capable of making great war plans but not winning the battle. Don't take this as advice from your boss, but take it as advice from your elder and a senior reporter—the job is harder than you think it is. If you just mechanically make the rounds or get by on the *Yomiuri* name, only one or two cops out of ten will leak anything to you. Maybe.

If you just aimlessly visit cops at their homes during the evening, you won't get them to say anything. Anybody can get the addresses of detectives from their senpai [senior reporters] and go to the house, wait a couple of hours, and, when they come home, butter them up and occasionally prime the pump with tickets to a Giants baseball game. If it were just a matter of doing that over and over, even a first-year reporter at Jiji Press could do it.

I'm aware that each person on the beat tries to shore up the sections he/she is in charge of. I know that you are figuring out which cop is worth bringing into the fold, but the issue is *what* are you doing to get that cop to be a source? What are you doing to distinguish yourself from other reporters? Take a moment to reflect on your efforts.

Do you take care of the cop you want to crack? Have you asked him his birthday, place of birth, family lineage, the birthdays of his wife and kids, his wedding anniversary, when his kids start school, whether they have found a job, what holidays or special events the family has coming up? Do you say proper greetings on those occasions or, even better, bring a present?

Do you take small gifts when you call on the cops in the evening? If you take them tickets to the Yomiuri Giants game, they won't be impressed. "Oh, he's a reporter for the *Yomiuri* newspaper, so he probably gets them for free" is what they'll be thinking. Go to Daimaru in Tokyo station or someplace like that and buy a regional food or drink from the area where you were born. Then tell your cop buddy, "I had someone back home send this." Or "I brought this back from a trip for you." Those kinds of lies are very effective. And timing is important. If you take him a warm meat pastry or a hot sweet-bean pastry on a cold day, all the better. If the cop doesn't come home, give it to his wife or girlfriend or mistress. Tell her, "Here, if it gets cold it doesn't taste good." This at least gets her to open the front door, and that's always an important first step.

Do you ask the cops to get food or something to drink with you? Do you make efforts to get the police to ride in the hired limousine with you? On a rainy day or

when the snow falls, this is the perfect opportunity to send them from their house to the train station or vice versa.

Do you randomly visit cops in the morning? Do you take copies of the *Yomiuri* to cops who don't subscribe to the *Yomiuri?* Even if you just spend 100 yen [about a dollar] to give the guy a can of coffee or a sports drink, that's enough to set you apart from the pack.

If one of your cop buddies is sick, do you take the time to visit him in the afternoon? If you just go visit him in the evening, that's about the level of a first-year reporter for Yamagata [Hickville] Television. If the wife or kids of the cops have a cold, buy some cold medicine, some orange juice, and take it to the house.

When you have the night shift, do you always let your cop buddy know that "Hey, I'm up all night at the office, so if anything interesting goes on, give me a buzz"? If your pal is on the night shift at the head office, take him a snack and bullshit for a while. Instead of complaining that you can't get through to the police when a new case breaks, make an effort to get in good with the public affairs guys so you are the first one to catch the story.

If you just complain, "The cops really favor the television reporters," nothing will change. That's the kind of whining you hear from first-year reporters at the Yamagata newspaper or even a part-time chick employed at the Akita office. If all you do is complain, you could have ten years on the police beat and still not win against the TV reporters. If you don't know your cop's birthday, use the branch offices, senior reporters, even employees at the local ward office to find out. Public utility companies also know the names and phone numbers of cops and where they have moved to recently.

Are you making use of the association of people from your prefecture (such as the Saitama Prefecture Native Association)? Even if you are a Tokyoite, join the prefectural association of where you were first assigned as a reporter. Use your police connections from when you were at a regional office to meet Tokyo cops who attended the police academy at the same time as your sources did.

Hanging out with your family and their family at the same time is the ultimate way to cultivate a source. Families that play together, stay together.

Have you ever taken your wife and kids with you on a Saturday and stopped by "because we were in the neighborhood"?

> Do you get your sources to introduce their *kohai* [younger officer friends and protégés] to you? If you know a cop who's going to retire this year, shamelessly become friends and get him to introduce his remaining buddies.

If you think this system creates a very cop-friendly, biased reporting style, you are absolutely correct. The Japanese police are extremely adept at manipulating the press, and we were extremely willing to submit to this manipulation for the possibility of getting a scoop.

The Chichibu Snack-mama Murder Case

For a reporter, dating is impossible. My budding relationship with my first serious Japanese girlfriend effectively ended with a phone call. Not from her but from Yamamoto, at nine in the evening. It was the first day I'd had off in three weeks, and I-chan and I were on my futon, catching up on some long-missed sex, when the phone rang. I had no choice but to dismount and pick up.

"Adelstein, we got a probable murder in Chichibu, and we need you to go to the scene. Get your ass down here in ten minutes. The car is running."

I started pulling on my clothes, and I-chan pouted.

"I'm sorry, hon," I said. "I've got to go to work."

"You bastard! You've gone, but I haven't gone yet."

(If you thought that was a typo, let me explain: In Japan, the act of achieving orgasm is referred to not as "coming" but as "going." This lends itself to the joke that Japanese-American couples have so much trouble communicating that they can't tell whether they're coming or going.)

"I-chan, I hate to leave you high and dry, but duty calls."

In perfect English, she replied, "Work, work, work. Make them wait five fucking minutes!"

I had already put on my shirt and was hunting for my *Yomiuri* armband, camera, wrinkle-free necktie, and pen. "I'll make it up to you. You can be on top next time," I said earnestly.

We'd been going through a rough patch in our romance lately. I was working nonstop, forgetting to call, and usually so tired, drunk, or hungover on my day off that I was far from entertaining. Things had not been good for a while, but I was hoping she'd get used to an

absentee boyfriend. In a passive-aggressive way, I hadn't been helping by neglecting to make a determination about "our future."

"Look, I'm really sorry. People are waiting for me."

"If you walk out that door, you walk out of this relationship," she said.

"I have to go," I said.

I got on my bicycle and pedaled to the office in record time. Yamamoto was waiting in the car, I hopped into the driver's seat, and off we sped toward Chichibu.

Yamamoto filled me in. The victim ran a snack bar[1*] in Chichibu. She'd been found in her bedroom, in her pajamas, in a prefectural public housing development at 7:45 that evening by an employee who'd gone to her apartment when she didn't show up at the bar and who then called 119 (Japan's version of 911). Initial reports made it sound as if she'd been hit on the right side of her head with a blunt instrument.

Yamamoto dropped me off at the crime scene with instructions to find a photo of the *mama-san* and to find someone who had nice things to say about her. He was heading to the Chichibu police station for the briefing. I was usually the reporter on the scene because the newspaper was reluctant to have me cover a police briefing. They were afraid I'd miss something important—a fear that was probably well founded then.

The victim lived in a dismal apartment complex—row upon row of uniform beige buildings typical of public housing in Japan. They were all faced with balconies with metal railings that had been rigged with clotheslines that always had laundry hanging from them, rain or shine, night or day. The place was ill lit, and the only sound of life within was the vague din of television sets bleeding through the thin walls of the apartments.

The police had cordoned off the entire building where the mamasan had lived. I played the stupid-gaijin card and ducked

under the KEEP OUT yellow tape. I was able to talk to two people before an officer approached me and said sternly, in English, “Go away. No can be here.”

I tried to make conversation with some folks who were hanging around the edges of the police barrier, looking up at the building. I walked into the adjacent beige building, ringing doorbells, asking about the mama-san, until I found a foreman at a concrete plant who’d been a regular at the snack bar.

He even had a picture of her—Snack-mama was surprisingly chubby—and he was willing to let me borrow it.

“Do you have any idea who would want to kill her?” I asked, deep in reporter mode.

“Hmm, I don’t know. Maybe some deadbeat customer who ran up a huge tab. She could really ride your ass if you didn’t pay your bill on time. I’ve known loan sharks who were more easy-going.”

This wasn’t exactly a quotable comment about the deceased. “What about her husband?” I asked.

“Not around. She lived with her daughter. People said they weren’t getting along. Something about the daughter’s boyfriend.”

“Was he a yakuza or just some kind of badass?”

“Nope. Worse. He was a foreigner.”

“What kind of foreigner?”

“Don’t know. I can’t tell the difference,” he said sheepishly. “Looks kind of like you.”

All right! I thought. We’ve got a suspect! I rang Yamamoto and gave him the news.

He complimented me on my investigative skills, then filled me in on what he’d learned at the briefing. The Chichibu police had declared it a murder and set up a special investigation headquarters, calling it, unofficially, “The Chichibu Snack-mama Murder Case.”

Snack-mama had been running her snack bar for close to fifteen years. She usually went to work at five in the afternoon, but when

she didn't show up that day, one of the hostesses went to her apartment. She'd knocked but gotten no answer. The door was locked. Worried, the hostess had the building manager open the door with a key.

The apartment was orderly, no signs of struggle or burglary, but Snack-mama was dead, lying on her futon, facedown, blood soaked into the mattress. The house was otherwise in order, and nothing appeared to have been stolen.

A preliminary autopsy suggested that she'd been killed sometime between midnight and early morning that day. The injury suggested that she'd been hit by a rodlike object, maybe a baseball bat, with enough force to kill her instantly. There was one blow to the skull, causing her to bleed to death.

The last time she'd been seen alive was at 1 A.M., when an employee had dropped her off after work. A friend from high school had telephoned her at 10 A.M. but gotten no answer, corroborating the estimated time of death. The daughter, age twenty-eight, had been seen leaving the house with a man around 2:30 A.M.

Yamamoto then asked me, "Is the forensic team around?"

"How would I know that?"

"They're wearing blue uniforms that cleverly say FORENSIC DEPARTMENT. They're looking for the weapon. If you can get a picture of them with the weapon, we'll use it. I'm sending Frenchie out to help you. Chappy will pick up the picture of the vic."

By the time Chappy showed up, it was getting close to dawn. He had brought me some *kairo*, instant heating pads that would, when pounded and exposed to air, impart the illusion of warmth. I stuffed them into every pocket I had and waited, looking around and hoping to catch something worthwhile.

The building was still cordoned off, but I could see the forensic guys poking around bushes on the far end of the crime scene, which abutted a field. Other reporters on the scene were canvassing the

parking lots in the complex, hoping to talk to people on their way to work.

I was looking for another angle when I noticed, in the bushes, what appeared to be a drainage ditch and a culvert in an embankment adjacent to the housing complex. I guessed it would lead out to the field and under the yellow tape. Impulsively I decided to see if I was correct.

I crawled into the culvert and emerged, smudged, right beneath the embankment. I had a great view of the investigators digging through the bushes and brush. I got out my humongous camera with a telephoto lens and started snapping away. Suddenly, I felt a large presence looming over me.

“You must be Mr. Adelstein,” a voice said.

I looked up nervously. It was Kanji Yokozawa, the head of the Forensic Department, a veteran homicide detective who commanded wide respect. He was wearing a modified baseball cap and square-cut frameless glasses, and he was clad in the dark blue scrubs of the forensic team, white latex gloves rolled down to his wrists.

I couldn’t tell if I was in trouble or not. Technically, I was behind the police line. “Ahh, yes, that would be me,” I said conversationally.

“Mr. Adelstein, I’m wondering how you got past that yellow tape over there.”

“Well, I crawled through the drainage tunnel.”

“I see. And are you getting any good photos?”

“Usable stuff. I was hoping for the magic moment when you find the murder weapon.”

“If we find it, I’ll let you know. I’ll even pose for the picture. But I don’t think it will be that easy. By the way, as you are scurrying through the fields, if you happen to find something that looks like a murder weapon, a bat, a metal rod, or some blunt object—please don’t touch it. Leave it where it is, but let us know.”

One thing about Yokozawa, he was always a gentleman, even when he had cause not to be. In homicide, most detectives have pretty short fuses, and they don't like reporters. Yokozawa was the exception. So I decided to see how far I could go. "As long as you're here and I'm here," I began, "do you think I could ask you a few questions?"

"Yes, you can ask. I may not be able to answer all of them, but I'll answer what I can."

"Thank you, Yokozawa-san," I said. "First question: The coroner says Snack-mama was killed with a single blow to the head. Lucky shot?"

"Good question. My guess is that the killer knew exactly what he was doing. Most criminals screw it up and strike again and again, even if the skull was smashed on the first blow. In the tension of the moment, sometimes they whack the shoulders, sometimes they break the victim's back. Not in this case. In a way, this was a professional job."

"A hit man?"

"No, not like that. Whoever killed her knew how to dispatch someone efficiently. He or she knew how to kill."

"So you're thinking the daughter's boyfriend?"

"I can't answer that. But I will tell you something, and I want you to think about this. The daughter's boyfriend, he's Iranian. A lot of the Iranians who are in Japan are ex-soldiers; many fought in the Iraq-Iran War. They know how to kill—with knives, guns, hands, blunt objects. In fact, although you may not quote me on this, many police officers are more afraid of Iranians than they are of the yakuza."

"Who do you think locked the door?"

"Well, it would have had to have been somebody with a key. It's possible that someone got into the apartment, killed Snack-mama, stole her key, and then locked the door to delay the finding of the body. It's possible but unlikely. First of all, it's doubtful Snack-mama

would leave the door unlocked or greet someone in her pajamas. So whoever locked the door after killing her probably had a key in the first place."

With that Yokozawa nodded and returned to the apartment building. As he left, he mentioned that he thought the case would be wrapped up fairly shortly.

I stuck around for another hour. I got one out-of-focus shot of a CSI guy in the parking lot, holding a plastic bag with what looked like a bloody sweatshirt inside. I didn't see anything else of interest.

Back at the office, we compared notes. According to Yamamoto, the cops were pretty sure that the daughter's boyfriend had killed Snack-mama. What they didn't know was if the daughter had put him up to it. The daughter was in shock, questioning was not going well, and the Iranian boyfriend was not to be found.

In the late 1980s, when the Japanese economy was at its peak and construction was rampant, an agreement between Japan and Iran gave Iranians the opportunity to work in Japan without a visa. Essentially this was part of an unofficial policy of the Japanese government to provide the country with much-needed cheap manual labor, and many Iranians came and stayed (and overstayed).

At the time, young Japanese were above what was known as 3K jobs: *kitanai* (dirty), *kitsui* (difficult), and *kurushii* (painful). In 1993, when the Japanese bubble deflated, the agreement was canceled, but Chichibu was still a place with enough heavy industry and factories to provide the Iranians with places to work.

Now, with this murder, the response of the Saitama police was to round up every Iranian working in Chichibu they could find. This was going to take time.

I did the allotted three days in Chichibu, following leads, talking to Iranians and factory workers, using the *Yomiuri* expense account for drinks in seedy hostess clubs with Chappy, and going to press

conferences where there was less and less information to be disseminated. And I got stuck covering the funeral.

Articles about funerals, with minor variations, follow the same pattern: funerals are carried out “quietly and somberly.” You can always hear “muffled sobbing” from the crowd. Even if the relatives of the deceased were having a fine time at the wake the night before, laughing and remembering good times with the deceased and getting rip-roaring drunk, that’s never what appears in the paper.

I really dreaded going to this one, and I had a legitimate reason. By now, everyone in the town knew that the chief suspect was the daughter’s Iranian boyfriend. I’m Jewish, with typical Jewish features—dark hair, olive skin, big nose. I could pass as an Iranian. I had visions of being mistaken for the suspect and trampled to death in front of the funeral pyre.

I protested to Yamamoto, but to no avail.

The turnout was huge. The victim’s daughter was there (we were told to get her picture since she was still a suspect), along with relatives and customers. All in all, about ninety people, all dressed in proper funereal black.

After the services had been conducted and everyone had placed incense on the charcoal brazier and bowed to the photo of the victim, the victim’s younger brother spoke on behalf of the relatives. “She was a wonderful sister. She always looked after people with dedication and attention. When I think about what happened to her, I’m just so angry. What am I supposed to do with this anger? Who can I take it out on?”

He paused, and it sure as hell seemed as if he were staring at me. In fact, except for the daughter, it seemed as if all ninety mourners were staring at me. I nervously pulled on my *Yomiuri* armband, hoping it would deflect some of the fury aimed my way. Then some little boy’s voice broke the silence: “I have to go to the toilet! I can’t

wait! I'm going to pee on the floor if I don't go now!" Nervous titters filled the room, and everyone's eyes slowly left me.

I would have liked to have gone home and crashed after that, but three days of sports records, event blurbs, and birth announcements had to be written up. I stayed at the office until one in the morning, checking to make sure we'd inputted the records correctly. I got a migraine from two hours of reading the scrawled cursive Japanese of the mothers who'd sent in pictures of their little whelps for publication. Chappy and I amused ourselves by making up rude captions such as, "I'm not slobbering because I'm an infant, I'm slobbering because Mom has great tits!" or "If you think I have a hairy face, you should see the hair on my tongue!" But eventually we had to finish the work.

I bicycled home at two in the morning. The apartment was empty. A note from I-chan lay on the futon: "It's over."

Her stuff was gone. She'd made up the futon and washed the dishes in the sink, even cleaned out the bathtub and taken out the trash. It was the most considerate breakup I'd ever experienced. I lay down on the futon in my suit and thought about calling her. I was still thinking about it when I fell asleep. And that was that.

Yamamoto decided that I needed to start doing the night rounds at Yokozawa's home. Yokozawa seemed to like me, he'd shared some information with me before, and Yamamoto was hoping he'd do it again—that is, leak something, anything, that would put us ahead of the competition on this story.

When I knocked on the door of Yokozawa's apartment, his wife answered. It was early evening, but he was home, lounging on the sofa in his bathrobe. He told me that most reporters knocked on his door only after ten at night, and he asked me not to tell anyone that he actually came home earlier than that. I laughed and agreed.

We chatted about the weather and my life in Japan and finally got around to the Chichibu case. He implied that a weapon had been found, but he wouldn't be pinned down. I kept mental notes; it's taboo for a reporter to take notes with a cop on the night rounds. That would dismantle the illusion that you are just two professionals making small talk, that you're not really trying to get some information. The rules aren't hard and fast, but generally speaking, what you pick up from a cop over drinks is never something that you can attribute to that person by name. If there's enough material to write an article, it's always "sources close to the investigation" or "the Saitama police."

Drinking is important for the police, too, because it gives them plausible deniability. The cop can say, "No, I never told that reporter anything. Well, we were drunk and maybe something slipped out. I can't remember."

Yokozawa and I discussed the fine points of the case for about half an hour, after which I went to the nearest telephone booth and called Yamamoto. I repeated the conversation as best I could, word for word. He told me I'd done great work and that he'd pass on the information. I had no idea if anything I'd said was important, but I guess Yamamoto understood the subtext, the bigger picture. I was too ashamed (yes, ashamed) to ask him exactly what had been useful.

The next morning at the press club, Yamamoto and Ono came in early and scrambled to get an article in the evening edition. We had the scoop, and the headline read, "Snack-mama Murder: Saitama Police to Arrest Iranian Boyfriend of Victim's Eldest[2*] Daughter."

The article noted that the police were about to arrest an Iranian who had already been prosecuted for immigration violations. Forensics had determined the culprit's identity through a bloodstained sweatshirt, a pair of pants with a key to the apartment in a pocket, and a bloodstained metal tool that had been found in the general area of the crime scene. The police had requested an arrest warrant and were expecting to serve it within the day.

It was a clean scoop. Not the investigative journalism kind of scoop, but the much-esteemed "we-wrote-it-before-the-police-announced-it" class of scoop. The police did arrest the boyfriend within the day, and the *Asahi*, our natural enemy in the newspaper world, was forced to follow up later.

I spoke that night with Yokozawa, who congratulated me on the scoop. I was duly modest; the fact was, I still didn't know what I'd done. According to the forensics chief, the boyfriend had killed snack-mama because she didn't want him to marry her daughter. He refused to admit his guilt, however, and claimed, "This is a police trap—I've been framed."

But as far as I was concerned, the case was finished. I didn't think about it again until almost a year later.

I was eating *yakisoba* at Omiya station when Takahashi, the newbie, rang me. It was a hysterical call, the same kind I used to make as a freshman when I was overwhelmed by unfolding news and three people were barking different commands at the same time. I finally got him to read me the press release.

The gist of the first bulletin was this: The body of a young Japanese female had been found in Maruyama Park in Ageo. She'd been strangled with a lady's scarf. Color of scarf? Not yet released.

I could hear Yamamoto yelling in the background for me to get to the crime scene. So off I sped to Maruyama Park.

Typically, parks in Tokyo and Saitama urban areas are giant parking lots with a couple of swing sets, teeter-totters, and sparse vegetation struggling to survive. But Maruyama Park was the real thing, with wide expanses of grass and groves of trees. The victim had been found in some bushes behind a gazebo in the center of the park.

The police had attempted to cordon off the entire park but had been thwarted by mothers angry that they had no place to take their children to play. So the off-limits area was confined to the area

immediately surrounding the crime scene. By the time I got there, the yellow tape was flanked by a crowd of curious housewives, park workers, loafing salarymen, students with nothing better to do, and senior citizens out for a stroll. Of course, reporters were already roaming around the park, looking for anything that would help make the story more coherent.

Since getting close to the crime scene was out of the question, I decided to join my fellow journalists in canvassing the parkgoers. Any suspicious activities? Did local gangs hang out in the park? Was the park a popular place for kids to make out? Was the park safe?

One toothless older man dressed in a golf shirt, jeans, and sandals said a lot of Iranians had been hanging out in the park recently. He figured they were out of work and killing time or maybe exchanging information about where to find work. When the first police car showed up this afternoon, he had watched them vanish. It was the best piece of information I had after an hour of work.

I called Nakajima and told him what I'd just learned.

"Shit! Try to find someone who saw something. Yamamoto is heading to the press conference. We'll keep you posted."

I walked around the park talking to people but came up with nothing further. I could see police officers doing the same thing, but the usual army of blue-uniformed forensic guys wasn't present. The police were so sure the scarf was the murder weapon that they didn't bother scouring the park for anything else.

When I next checked in with the office, Yamamoto wanted me to go with him to the press conference at the police station. My job would be to take notes and relay them back to people putting the story together for the next edition. (They'd begun trusting my ability to comprehend Japanese—or maybe they'd run out of personnel. My Japanese skills were up to junior high school level.)

Saeki, the head of Saitama homicide, was running the press conference. He had bad skin and thick glasses, and even though he was at least twenty pounds overweight, he still managed to find suits that were baggy on him. He was growing bald, so he combed

his hair, grown long on the sides, over the bald part on top, producing the hairstyle known in Japan as a “bar code.” Saeki also had a reputation as an extraordinary cop. I annoyed the hell out of him, for reasons I never understood, so I was glad Yamamoto was along to ask questions.

The conference started with a biography of the twenty-three-year-old victim, followed by a barrage of extremely precise but not necessarily important questions that reporters have to ask. Where was the body located? Which way were the feet pointed? Was the body faceup? Which direction was her head pointed toward? (This last question is actually relevant. Japanese usually lay out corpses with the head facing north, so if the body was laid out that way, it might indicate a Japanese murderer feeling remorse.)

Saeki told everyone to shut up and listen.

The body was found on the north side of the Summer Pavilion, in the bushes. Her head was pointed toward the pavilion while her body was laid out parallel to the shrubbery. She was found faceup, both hands spread out. She was wearing dark blue overalls with a striped blouse. She was wearing shoes and socks. (Another telling sign: if she didn’t have her shoes and socks on—and if they weren’t part of the crime scene—that opened up the possibility of a double suicide attempt in which her partner chickened out. The reason: typically Japanese remove their shoes and socks before killing themselves. Just as it is a terrible faux pas to walk into a Japanese house with shoes on, it is considered rude, however unconsciously, to enter the afterlife without such decorum.)

Her blouse was pulled up slightly, and you could see her underwear. She was wearing the same clothes she been wearing the day before.

And she had been strangled to death with a pink scarf.

In her pockets were car keys and a handkerchief. The car had been located nearby; under the driver’s seat was a drawstring purse containing 6,000 yen (about $60) in cash, potentially ruling out the

motive of robbery, and the victim's ID. Her family name was Nakagawa.

There was nothing more.

Yamamoto sent me back to the park to join the police seeking any eyewitnesses. Other reporters were dispatched to the victim's home.

After a few hours, we met and reviewed our notes: Saitama police had found the victim's address book, and among the forty names listed were several foreigners. Police were questioning each of them. The pink scarf, supposed to be the murder weapon, did not belong to the victim; her family members had never seen it before. But the critical thing (again) was: the victim had a foreign boyfriend. On the day she was killed, she had gone to meet him. His name was Abdul, but he went by "Andy." Apparently, he was an Iranian pretending to be French. According to a friend of the victim, the couple had originally met at a gym in Ageo.

Hearing that, Nakajima and Takahashi took off for Ageo, hoping to learn something at the gym. Instead, they were promptly turned away by staff who had been warned by the police not to speak to the press.

Enter the gaijin's great idea: I would try my luck at the gym by posing to be a buddy of the Iranian boyfriend. As expected, Yamamoto thought it a clever tactic but Nakajima thought it was nuts. But finally all agreed: what the hell. I changed into jeans and a polo shirt. I hadn't shaved that morning, so I had a nice growth of stubble. I was sure I could pass.

Once I got in the door, I went to the reception area and, speaking in my made-up Iranian-accented Japanese, mentioned that Andy was my friend and countryman and asked how much membership at the gym would cost me (it wasn't cheap). The staff looked wary but slowly warmed to my pushiness. They talked about what a cute couple Andy and Nakagawa had been. That was my chance to say, ever so casually, that since membership cost so much I needed to borrow some money from Andy. I knew where he worked, but did they know where he lived?

They were very accommodating. With the address in my hand, I walked out of the gym feeling like Jim Phelps in *Mission: Impossible*.

Jumbo and I immediately went to Andy's address, a run-down, two-story wooden structure with a washing machine in the hallway for common use. We learned from the surly landlord that police had raided the place a few hours after the body had been found and hauled off a dozen so-called foreigners for overstaying their visa. This little discussion was interrupted by two police officers who just happened to come back to the apartment building, and they kicked us out.

Meanwhile there was havoc at the police station. The gym staff had called the station within minutes of my being there, and a sketch artist was dispatched to make a composite drawing of the "suspicious friend of Andy." Several detectives were assigned to find this friend, a potential accomplice, and began pounding the pavement for clues, showing the composite drawing to people in the park. Another two detectives were assigned to surveillance at the gym, in case the suspicious friend came back.

It was the next morning when I learned what had happened. Around midnight that night, the forensics chief, Yokozawa, was studying the composite drawing when the realization hit. "You idiots!" he yelled at his detectives. "This is no Iranian! This is the *Yomiuri's* gaijin reporter pretending he's an Iranian!"

The gentlemanly Yokozawa was sorely pissed off, and the detectives were ready to lock me up. Yamamoto got an irate phone call and apologized profusely, bowing unseen as he did so. He had the decency not to yell at me but politely suggested I get down on my knees and beg the forgiveness of Saeki and Yokozawa. I'd wasted an entire day of the police department's time, sending several detectives on a fool's errand.

The next day, before the press briefing, I walked up to Saeki and, feeling a little queasy, stuttered an apology. Saeki was not amused. For a second, I thought he was going to hit me. He glared at me for two seconds, then said slowly, "You know, Adelstein, I have half a

mind to haul your ass to jail for interfering with an investigation. But you're a young, green, clueless barbarian, so I'll let it slide this time. Don't do it again."

"I promise I won't," I said, and then, shamelessly making the most of the opportunity, I continued, "By the way, it looks like you guys rounded up every Iranian in town, including her boyfriend, no?"

Saeki was stupefied by my balls. He took off his glasses, wiped them with a tissue, and began, "Well, I see that you've had some success with your Iranian impression. I won't say that you're right or wrong, but you're not so far off." He smiled and put his glasses back on. "Gotta run. Be a good kid and stay out of our way." He headed back up to the conference room on the upper floors.

I found Yokozawa buying a can of apple juice at the vending machine on the first floor and offered my apology, bowing so low that my forehead scraped the floor. He patted me on the head as I stood bent over and said, "Apology accepted. Just don't pull a stunt like that again. I'm not going to let you live this down, by the way." Even now, more than a decade later, I can't run into him without his making a reference to my Iranian heritage.

I continued working on the case, but in the end we got our ass kicked. One morning, both the *Mainichi* and the *Sankei* scooped us with articles suggesting that Abdul, the Iranian boyfriend, was the killer and that he was already in custody. I remember it as being a bad day to be on the police beat. We'd taken the cautious approach, and the competition had hotdogged it and run all over us.

I'll never know if part of the police's reluctance to give us the facts was due to my little masquerade at the fitness club. It's probably better that I don't know.

1* A snack bar is kind of a low-rent hostess club. Usually it has a karaoke machine, a few girls serving drinks, and some light fare. The manager is usually a former hostess past her prime, but that's not an ironclad rule.

2* The order of birth is a big deal in Japan. I was chewed out many times for not checking whether a person named in an article was the oldest, second, or youngest son or daughter.

Even when there is an only child involved, you refer to him or her as eldest daughter or eldest son. The eldest sibling in a family is automatically given deference, respect, and authority, and is often literally called eldest daughter *(onē-san)* or eldest son *(onī-san)*. I tried to explain this to my younger sisters in Missouri; their response: “In this country, you may be the eldest son, but you’re still just a geek.”

Bury Me in a Shallow Grave:

When the Yakuza Come Calling

The history of the yakuza is murky. There are two major types: *tekiya*, who are essentially street merchants and small-time con artists, and *bakuto*, originally gamblers but now including loan sharks, protection money collectors, pimps, and corporate raiders. Almost half of the yakuza are Korean-Japanese, many of them the children of Koreans brought over as forced labor during Japan's colonial period. Another large faction is made up of *dowa*, the former untouchable caste of Japan that handled butchering animals, making leather goods, and doing other "unclean" jobs. Even though the caste system is gone, racism toward dowa remains.

There are twenty-two officially recognized yakuza groups in Japan. The big three are the Sumiyoshi-kai, with 12,000 members; the Inagawa-kai, with 10,000 members; and at the top the Yamaguchi-gumi. There are 40,000 members of the Yamaguchi-gumi and more than a hundred subgroups. Each group is required to pay monthly dues, which are funneled to the top of the organization. In essence, every month the Yamaguchi-gumi headquarters takes in (at a conservative estimate) more than $50 million in private equity. The Yamaguchi-gumi originally began as a loose labor union of dockworkers in Kobe. It began to branch out into industry in the chaos following the Second World War. Japan's National Police Agency estimates that, including the Yamaguchi-gumi, there are 86,000 gangsters in the country's crime syndicates, many times the strength of the U.S. Mafia at its violent peak.

The yakuza are structured as a neofamily. New recruits pledge their loyalties to the father figure known as the oyabun. Ties are forged through ritual sake exchanges, creating brotherhoods, and

those who are in the business world are allowed to become *kigyoshatei*, or corporate brothers. Each organization is usually a pyramid structure.

The modern-day yakuza are innovative entrepreneurs; rather than a bunch of tattooed nine-fingered thugs in white suits wielding samurai swords, a more appropriate metaphor would be "Goldman Sachs with guns." A 2007 National Police Agency white paper warned that the yakuza have moved into securities trading and infected hundreds of Japan's listed companies, a "disease that will shake the foundations of the economy." According to "An Overview of Japanese Police," an English document by the National Police Agency distributed to foreign police agencies in August 2008, *"Boryokudan (yakuza)* groups pose an enormous threat to civil affairs and corporate transactions. They are also committing a variety of crime to raise funds by invading the legitimate business community and pretending to be engaged in legitimate business deals. They do this either through companies, etc. which they are involved in managing or in cooperation with other companies."

The yakuza have long occupied an ambiguous position in Japan. Like their Italian cousins, they have deep if murky historical links with the county's ruling party, in Japan's case the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Robert Whiting, the author of *Tokyo Underworld*, and other experts point out that the LDP was actually founded with yakuza money. It's such an open secret that you can buy comic books at 7-Eleven discussing how this happened. Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's grandfather was a member of the Inagawa-kai crime group and heavily tattooed. He served as a cabinet minister and was referred to by his constituents as Irezumidaijin—"the tattooed minister." In the past the yakuza's reputation for keeping disputes between themselves and not harming the families of other mobsters, or "noncombatants," protected them from the ire of citizens and the attentions of the police. They were considered a "necessary evil" and a "second police force" that kept the streets of Japan safe from muggers and common thieves. Yet they were still considered outlaws.

That ambiguity was supposed to have ended in 1992, when the government introduced the toughest antimob legislation in a generation, punishment for the excesses of the yakuza during the booming 1980s, when they shifted en masse into real estate and other legitimate businesses. But the state still hasn't made membership of a criminal organization illegal or given the police the antimob tools long considered crucial in other countries: wiretapping, plea bargaining, and witness protection.

It seems unlikely that such radical tools to dismantle the yakuza will soon be given to the Japanese police forces. In many ways, the yakuza are stronger than ever despite almost seventeen years since the first laws targeting them went on the books.

The Yamaguchi-gumi has a high-walled central compound in one of the wealthiest parts of Kobe. They own land, and are impossible to drive out. Of course, that's because the yakuza are recognized as legal entities in Japan. They have the same rights as any corporate entity, and their members have the same rights as ordinary citizens. They are fraternal organizations—like the Rotary Club. Even in cases where they do not own the property where they have set up their offices and are simply renters, they are almost impossible to remove. The Nagoya Lawyers' Association advises that many businesses and landlords should insert an "organized crime exclusionary clause" into any contract drawn up, to make it easier to sever ties with yakuza tenants or businesses when the time comes. Nagoya is the home of the Yamaguchi-gumi's leading faction, the Kodo-kai, which has roughly four thousand members.

Problems with organized crime in Nagoya are so extensive that in 2001, the lawyer's association issued a manual of sorts entitled *Organized Crime Front Companies: What They Are and How to Deal with Them*. There are lawyers who specialize in dealing with yakuza.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Police compiled a list in 2006 of roughly one thousand yakuza front companies in greater Tokyo;[1*] about a fifth of them are real estate firms. The most recent list shows further

movement into securities, auditing, consulting, and other areas generally associated with the finance world.

A 1998 NPA examination of the front companies of the three major crime groups in Japan listed construction, real estate, finance, bars and restaurants, and management consulting as the top five types of yakuza front companies.

Some police officers in Tokyo use the word “Realtor” as a synonym for yakuza, so strong are the connections. In March 2008, Suruga Corporation (formerly listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange Second Section) was revealed to have paid more than 14 billion yen ($146 million) to Yamaguchi-gumi and Goto-gumi affiliates over several years to have the yakuza remove tenants from properties it wished to acquire. The scandal that followed resulted in the firm being delisted and again cast light on the tight relationships between the yakuza and the real estate industry.

What is also significant about this incident is that on the Suruga board of directors were a former prosecutor and also a former bureaucrat from the Organized Crime Control Bureau of the National Police Agency. This suggests that the people who are supposed to be policing the yakuza are easily deceived by them or perhaps knowingly working in collusion with them. There certainly exists case after case that suggest that the authorities are unable to contain the yakuza and/or are afraid to even try.

All this simply goes to show that the yakuza are very well aware of how the law protects their rights to live and operate where they wish and they will not easily be removed.

The major gang bosses are well-known celebrities. Bosses from the Sumiyoshi-kai and the Inagawa-kai grant interviews to print publications and television. Politicians are seen having dinner with them. They own talent agencies that the general public knows are yakuza front companies—such as Burning Productions—but that does not stop major Japanese media outlets from working with them. There are fan magazines, comic books, and movies that glamorize the yakuza, who have metastasized into society and

operate in plain view in a way unthinkable to American or European observers.

As the yakuza continue to evolve and get into more sophisticated crimes, the police have had a tough time keeping up. The so-called *marubo* cops (organized crime control detectives) are used to dealing with simple cases of extortion and intimidation, not massive stock manipulation or complicated fraud schemes.

The Yamaguchi-gumi have been notoriously uncooperative since Shinobu Tsukasa took power in 2005. The police used to be able to play the various organizations against one another to extract information—the Yamaguchi-gumi would rat on the Sumiyoshi-kai, the Sumiyoshi-kai on the Yamaguchi-gumi, and so on. But now the Yamaguchi-gumi is increasingly the only player in town and it has no reason to cooperate. In fact, the Aichi police, when raiding a Kodo-kai office in 2007, were horrified to discover that the faces, family photos, and addresses of the detectives working organized crime were posted on the walls of the yakuza headquarters. The names of all the organized crime detectives of another major police agency in Japan were leaked onto the Internet last year. The yakuza, especially the Yamaguchi-gumi, are not only not afraid of the police anymore, they are saying, essentially, "We know who you are, we know where you live, so be careful."

A detective from the Osaka Prefectural Police Department concurs. "Since the anti–organized crime laws went on the books in 1992, the numbers of the yakuza have changed very little—hovering around eighty thousand—for sixteen years. They have more money and more power than they ever had before, and the consolidation of the Yamaguchi-gumi has made it a huge force to be reckoned with. In many ways, the Yamaguchi-gumi is the LDP of organized crime, operating on the principal that 'Power is in numbers.' It has capital, it has manpower, it has an information network that rivals anything the police have, and it is expanding into every industry where money is to be made."

In the old days, the yakuza left the general population alone. But that was a long time ago. No one is off limits anymore, not even

journalists—or their children.

Like many reporters, I covered the yakuza for quite some time without actually ever dealing with them directly. That changed very quickly when a call came in from Naoya Kaneko, aka “The Cat,” the number two man in the Sumiyoshi-kai for all of Saitama, who left a message with The Face. He wanted to speak to me. This unnerved The Face, and when he passed on the message, he asked nervously, “You’re not in trouble, are you? Why does the Sumiyoshi-kai want to talk to you?”

I told him that I didn’t think I was in trouble and that I had no idea why he wanted to talk to me. I thought to ask Yamamoto how I should proceed, but then I thought twice: he’d probably say to ignore the call or dispatch a senior reporter to go with me. I told The Face I’d handle it.

This was at a time in my life when I was a regular at the Maid Station, ostensibly teaching English after hours to some employees. Maid Station was in the “image health” genre of adult entertainment. The girls dressed as maids, referred to the customers as “master,” and would bathe you, massage you, and blow you. Five of the girls were planning a holiday to Australia, and their solicitous manager, whom I had known when he drove a cab in Saitama, arranged for them to have private English lessons. I was the teacher.

The club was located in Minami Ginza, in the heart of Sumiyoshi-kai territory, and I pondered the possible reasons why Kaneko had called. Was I misbehaving on his turf? Maybe he was going to blackmail me? But what for? I was a single guy, and in Saitama during the nineties, going for a “sexual massage” was as Japanese as sushi.

I really didn’t know what to do, but my cop source assured me that Kaneko was not a threat and that it could actually be good for me as a reporter to know him, so I called Kaneko’s office from a public telephone.

The guy who picked up was loud and surly. I identified myself, and there was a long pause while he seemed to be figuring out how to address me. I had to repeat my name seven times. Then the guy spoke to Kaneko. It went something like this: “Hey, there’s this fucking gaijin on the phone, and he says he’s a reporter. Do you know this asshole?”

Kaneko roared at him, “Cover the mouthpiece of that phone, and treat the man with respect. I’ve been waiting for his call.”

I’d expected Kaneko to come off as a raspy, threatening, unintelligible thug, but when he came on the line, his voice had an amazingly smooth finish. He sounded like Ernst Blofeld in *Diamonds Are Forever*. He had what the Japanese call a cat-stroking voice, a kind of purr. “So you’re Jake,” he began. “I apologize for calling you at work. I didn’t know how else to reach you. And please forgive my underlings. They are rude, impolite, and uneducated. Please take no offense.”

“Umm, none taken. What can I do for you?”

“I have an unusual problem. It’s rather sensitive, and I was hoping that you might be able to help me solve it.”

“Well, I’m not really in the habit of solving problems for yakuza.”

“Of course not. I realize that I’m putting you into an awkward position. However, I would very much like to talk to you about this personal matter. I could make it worth your while …”

“I’d be happy to talk to you. I just can’t accept anything from you.”

“All right. When would you be available?”

“How about after lunch tomorrow?”

“Good. Thank you. Here is how to find me … If you get lost, just ask around. People know where I am.”

• • •

Since I have no sense of direction, I did get lost and had to ask the tout at a "pink salon"[2*] to point me the way to Kaneko's office. The tout politely drew me a map. He then mentioned that I'd be welcome to come in and sample the salon's pleasures. Normally foreigners weren't allowed, but any friend of Kaneko's was a friend of the establishment. Besides, he added wryly, business was slow in the afternoon.

I declined. I had a job to do.

Located just past a row of sex clubs, a Vietnamese restaurant, and a taxidermist, The Cat's headquarters looked like a branch office of a small construction firm. There was a company name on the glass door that slid open at my touch. In the reception area, a scary-looking fellow was sitting on a sofa, thumbing through a pornographic magazine. He looked up, stood, and, saying not a word, knocked on the door to an office.

Out stepped Naoya "The Cat" Kaneko. He was about five feet seven, probably in his late fifties. His eyes were narrow, he was a little thin on top, he had a goatee. Dark suit, white shirt, paisley tie, black loafers. Two gold rings on his right hand. He looked more like a politician than the second in command of the Sumiyoshi-kai organized crime group.

We shook hands, and Kaneko motioned for me to sit on one of the three dark brown leather sofas. He sat down opposite me. The scary-looking guy stepped out of the room and came back with two cups of green tea served in lacquer saucers (meant to show respect).

Kaneko sipped his tea, but I let mine sit.

"You don't want the tea?"

"I'm not a big green tea fan," I replied, waving my hand.

"How about coffee?"

"Sounds good."

"Right." He turned to the scary guy and barked, "Bring him some coffee."

He seemed relieved when the coffee came and I brought the cup to my lips.

Now we began our formal introduction. Kaneko handed me his *meishi* (business card), which I took with both hands and bowed. I then handed him my card, which he in turn received with both hands and bowed (but not as deeply as I had).

The rituals of meishi exchange are well known. This is what I was taught: You hand your card over with one hand to show that you are a lightweight, a nothing, and humble. You take the other man's card with both hands, to show that he is more substantial and weighty than humble you. You lift his card up slightly to eye level, look over the card, and assess your mutual social positions to determine the proper mode of polite speech. You take his card and put it in your card holder if you are both standing. You never fold, spindle, or mutilate the other person's card, which would be a grievous insult. I glanced at his title and the ornate lettering of the card before deftly putting it into my business card container. He likewise looked at the writing on my card, then slipped it into his business card container, which appeared to be made of solid platinum.

We made small talk. He asked me how a foreigner had gotten hired by the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, and I summarized my life in Japan up until that point, including going to school at Sophia University. He listened and we chatted; all seemed unnervingly normal.

"I wish I'd gone to college," he said. "It would have been a different life for me. I could have gone. You're lucky that you had the opportunity."

I acknowledged that and then cleared my throat and got to the point: why had he called me?

"I heard that you're trustworthy and that you're good at what you do."

"Who did you hear this from?"

"That would be telling. Let's just say I've heard good things about you. There's something I need to know, and I think you could find it

out. I think you would keep it to yourself too. People say you're like a Japanese, an honorable man."

"That's news to me. You sure you have the right gaijin?"

"I'm sure."

It's not often a yakuza pays you a compliment. It was probably insincere, but I didn't mind.

So I returned the favor. "Well, I hear that for a yakuza you're not a total scumbag. I hear that you're a gentleman and more of a white-collar criminal than a thug. In your line of business, I guess that would mean you're like Mother Teresa."

He chuckled at that and asked who I knew that knew him. I told him that that would be telling. It was a touché that made him smile.

He offered me a cigarette, which I accepted, which he lit, and which I tried not to inhale. He, on the other hand, lit up and inhaled so deeply that the tobacco sparked, and then he pointed at my cup of tea, sitting untouched.

"You want to ask me why I don't like green tea?" I asked.

Kaneko laughed. "No, but the story is about tea, actually. You see, a few detectives from the Saitama police force drop in here once or twice a week. I usually offer them a cup of tea, maybe some pastries. We chat; they leave. That's the usual protocol. But lately, when I put tea out for them, they won't touch it. They won't touch anything. They make a point of refusing."

"That's a problem?"

"Let me finish. I asked them why they were refusing my small gesture of hospitality, and they said that the word on the police force is that I'm bribing a cop, that I have one of the detectives in my pocket. These guys tell me, 'If we take anything from you—tea, candy, even a calendar—internal affairs will be all over us.' So they refuse."

"Why is that a problem for you?"

"Because now everyone in the organization thinks that the police are just posing. They think that I'm now an informant for the police,

that I've turned."

"Because they won't drink your tea?"

"Exactly. I think the cops really believe that I'm bribing one of them, but the people I work with don't believe them. They think it's a police ruse to make me look like I'm *not* an informant. If this keeps up, I'm going to be in serious trouble."

"What would serious trouble mean in your line of work?"

"It would mean that my own crew and the people I have raised like my children are going to drag me out to the mountains of Chichibu in the middle of the night, shoot me in the head, and bury me in a shallow grave."

"Ouch. Could it get any worse?"

"Oh, yes. They might make me dig my own grave, beat me to a pulp, and then bury me alive. But I don't think that will happen. I've been around for a long time. I think I've earned enough respect to be buried only after I'm completely dead."

I was about to laugh and looked for some indication that he was making a joke. Didn't see one. The Cat must have been pretty desperate, calling me.

"Well, who do you have in your pocket?" I had to ask.

"No one. I don't bribe cops. And I'm not a snitch. That's not how I do business. The cops and I have always had a good working relationship, so I have no idea where this shit is coming from." He was hunched over the table now, almost whispering to me. Our noses could have touched. It could have been my first Eskimo kiss with a yakuza.

"So …"

"I'd like to know why the Saitama police are so convinced I'm bribing them. I'd like to know the name of the cop I'm supposed to be bribing. If I knew that, I could handle the situation."

I had to think about this for a little while. It took me another cigarette to figure out what to say.

“Well, Kaneko-san, I’m a reporter, not an informant for the yakuza. And to tell the truth, I really don’t like doing favors for the yakuza. I do know one person I can talk to. If I decide that there is information that I can pass on to you, I will. I won’t make any promises.”

“That’s all I ask.”

“As long as I’m here, can I ask you a question? Not a favor, a question.”

“Go ahead. It’s the least I can do.”

“How do you make money for the organization? The police release these figures that suggest seventy percent of your cash comes from selling speed. It sounds like bullshit to me. Maybe there are thousands of speed freaks in Saitama, but I sure as hell don’t see many of them.”

“You’re correct. I won’t go into specifics, but I’ll tell you how this enterprise works if you’re interested.”

“I am.”

Kaneko then proceeded to outline his style of organized crime to me. The Sumiyoshi-kai in its heyday had been very active in jacking up land prices for a kickback from the Realtors or the banks. It had also made money by getting tenants out of apartment buildings or houses that would be worth more if sold on the open market, a practice known as *jiage*, or “land-sharking.” With tenant laws in Japan being so much in the favor of the tenant, its services were in demand. Or it would deliberately block the public auction of seized property by moving yakuza into the buildings or apartments. Sometimes it would do it on behalf of the original owner, so he could buy the property back at a low price. Sometimes it would buy the property itself and sell it to a front company. Waste disposal—illegal waste disposal—was a good source of revenue, and then there was protection money from the sex industry in Omiya.

But the biggest cash cow was extortion. Kaneko put it this way: “You and I are in the same business. You collect information and sell it; so do we. You get paid to put scandalous information in the

paper; we get paid to keep that information out of the paper. We're both in the information industry."

What Kaneko meant was that the Sumiyoshi-kai would shake down businesses and businessmen that had embarrassing secrets. Or it would sometimes get wind of a company that was struggling financially and approach it with offers to help. It'd strip the company of all remaining assets and real estate, taking the company down after using it for other fraudulent enterprises. Mind you, the struggling company was often a willing participant in the proceedings. The Sumiyoshi-kai would use the company's real estate to secure loans from midsize banks, which they never paid back. The company would go bankrupt, but it—and the company executive—would have gotten their cut. Finally, when the property was seized and put up for auction, the yakuza would interfere with the process, buy the land and buildings at a low price and sell them off or let a third party buy the property and take a cut of the transaction as a kickback.

The Sumiyoshi-kai also ran several front companies: temporary staffing agencies, loan-sharking operations, even an insurance company. The insurance company was used to generate false claims to rip off real insurance companies. It had a collection agency that recovered bad debts for legitimate consumer-loan companies. It scalped tickets and ran pawnshops trafficking in stolen goods. Of course, it also had a talent agency, which supplied young women to porn producers. The women were paid well. No coercion was involved.

It ran retail shops selling adult goods and teenage girls' used underwear, which Japanese men are obsessed with. It handled transportation, trucking, shipping, and security for large events. It would get a contract as a construction company and subcontract all the work without doing a thing, except for pocketing the difference between what it paid the subcontractor and what it received.

The fake political organization it had set up not only got a tax break but was a better venue for shaking down companies. It would get companies to subscribe to the group's newsletter at an

exorbitant price, thus collecting hush money in a less obvious fashion.

Kaneko's exegesis on the yakuza economy was brilliant, concise, incisive. In one hour, he laid out the system before me better than anyone else has. When he was done, fulfilling his part of this bargain, I promised to see what I could reasonably find out. As I took my leave, he offered to have his driver take me to my next destination; I chose not to accept.

That night I called my source and repeated everything Kaneko had said to me.

"Very interesting," he said. "I'll personally look into this. My guess is that someone in his own organization is trying to take The Cat down. Ten to one it's a power struggle."

"What does he mean by saying that he has a good working relationship with the cops?"

"Ahh, that. Let me explain. Part of being a yakuza cop is being assigned to Anti–Organized Crime Division 1, which gathers information on the yakuza: How many offices do they have? How many members? Who's in the organization and who's not? For the yakuza cops, the fastest way to get the answers is to go to the yakuza and ask. The Cat is a crafty old guy, so he won't come right out and tell you. He'll just leave the materials lying around the office, and we'll just offhandedly read them while he's on the phone. Sometimes he'll leave them in the garbage can so we can 'steal' them. He never hands them over."

"Why would he do that?"

"Because it's the way things work. He keeps the cops happy so we don't have to find an excuse to raid the office to get the intel we need. It works out well."

"Why don't you just tap his phones?"

"This isn't America, and we aren't the FBI. We couldn't get permission to run a wiretap. It just doesn't happen."

“You don’t think he’s bribing somebody?”

“If he was, he wouldn’t be stupid enough to get caught doing it. He’s the smartest yakuza in the organization. I’ll find out what’s going on and get back to you.”

• • •

Two days later, he called me with the goods. The rumor was being spread by one Yoshinori Saito, the number four guy in the Sumiyoshi-kai. Saito had told one of the detectives in Section 1 that Kaneko was bribing a cop. Saito hadn’t named the cop, thus sending the police into a feeding frenzy while they tried to find the mole.

That was on the cop side. On the yakuza side, Kaneko and Saito had long been at odds with each other. Lately, Saito had wanted to sell speed to the convoy of truck drivers who made their way through Saitama, but Kaneko didn’t want any part of it. Kaneko’s boss, Nakamura, had allegedly been a meth head in his youth, and Kaneko didn’t want his boss getting involved in a business that might tempt him to return to bad habits. Saito had deliberately spread the rumor, knowing that it would result, through a certain convoluted logic, in making the organization think The Cat was a police stoolie. Saito didn’t have the guts to challenge The Cat himself. He was going to let the organization take care of it.

“So what do you think I should I do with this information?”

“Tell it to Kaneko. As soon as possible.”

Reluctantly I agreed to communicate the situation to Kaneko. I called his office and scheduled an appointment for that night.

It was freezing cold, which didn’t help because I was already getting the shivers. Besides, yakuza offices are spooky enough in broad daylight. Before I could even knock on the door, Kaneko opened it and gestured me inside. He was wearing jeans and a dark green sweater. He looked like a yachting instructor.

I sat down on the sofa, and this time I drank the tea. I told The Cat everything I knew.

He nodded as I spoke, closing his eyes, fingers spread out on the table. “Thank you. I now understand. I owe you for this,” he said.

“Maybe it’s not my place to say this,” I dared, foolishly, “but rather than having to deal with this crap, why don’t you just leave the organization?”

The Cat opened his eyes and took a deep breath. “Look at me. If I dress like this, I look like any other businessman on the train on his day off. But if I roll up my sleeves”—which he then began to do—“that’s the end of the pretty picture.” From his wrists, extending up his arms as far as I could see, were gaudy, elaborate tattoos. You couldn’t see a vestige of bare skin.

“I’m long past forty, and I’ve branded myself for life. I’ve got no education, no diploma. I don’t have social security or health insurance. I have money in the bank, and I have this organization. Where could I go? If I run, the Sumiyoshi-kai will hunt me down and kill me because they’ll think I’ve turned into a dog for the cops. If I stay, I have a chance to survive. It’s not much of a life, but I’m not ready to throw it away. So I’ll deal with this problem.”

I thanked him for the tea and got ready to leave. He put his hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eyes.

“You’ve saved my life. I don’t forget these things. If there’s anything you need—information, women, money—come talk to me. There are some debts that are never repayable. I’ll owe you until I die.”

“I didn’t really do much.”

“It’s not how much you do that counts, it’s what you get done.”

“Then what I’d like is information. I don’t want it if it has strings attached, though. I don’t ever want to owe a yakuza.”

“That’s not a problem. But I’ll tell you now: I will share information with you on what other yakuza groups are up to, but not our own. Our business remains our business. You can ask questions and I won’t lie to you, but if it involves us I’ll tell you I won’t discuss it. Is that understood?”

“Understood.”

“You sure you don’t need any pussy?”

“No, I’m okay.”

“Is it because you like boys?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Well, then, all right.” He walked me to the door and shook my hand.

Two weeks later the Saitama police were once again drinking green tea at The Cat’s office. I never asked what had happened to Saito; Kaneko and I never discussed the incident again.

From that point, Kaneko and I carried on a very businesslike relationship. I’d drop by for tea every couple of weeks, and I’d always call in advance. He’d give me some leads on a few stories, we’d chat about the predations of yakuza life versus that of reporter life, and then we’d go our separate ways. He’d always try to fix me up with a hot Japanese woman, and I’d always decline.

Having The Cat on my side was a huge plus as a reporter. Of course, I had reservations about taking his information. I was sure that sooner or later he would lean on me for a favor; but he never did. I also wondered if taking information from a man who was, by his own admission, an antisocial lawbreaker was morally defensible. I suppose that’s all part of Informant 101, but still I had qualms. Eventually, I came to understand the lesson that had been taught to me from the beginning: information is neither good nor evil; information is what information is. The people providing the information have their reasons and motives, many of them impure. What matters is the purity of the information, not the person.

Thanks to The Cat, at one point in time, I knew when a gang war was breaking out between yakuza factions before the police did. It helped me stay on the ball. He was the best source a crime reporter could ask for, since it’s always better to have one great source than a hundred lousy ones.

1* The Japan Anti-Social Organized Crime Database (JASOC), a private corporate database, as of March 2009, lists more than 2,400 in the Kanto area.

2* Otherwise known as blow job parlors; hand jobs are also available. Usually 3,000 yen ($30) for thirty minutes. You get a cup of coffee in addition to the gratification. There aren't many of these parlors left in greater Tokyo. According to one magazine that targets women who want to work in the sex industry, there is the occupational risk of carpal tunnel syndrome.

The Saitama Dog Lover Serial Disappearances, Part One: So You're Asking Me to Trust You?

My focus now was on organized crime, theft, and public security. In other words, the yakuza 24/7.

Yamamoto had moved up and was running the show, which made Nakajima number two in the office. Nakajima and I weren't really getting along, and everyone had started to refer to us as "the Cobra and the Mongoose." I got the mongoose moniker because, one, I had more hair, and, two, I was more squirrely, running around manically all the time. Nakajima, on the other hand, had what the Japanese call "a poison tongue" *(dokuzetsu)*, meaning that he was very critical, sarcastic, and good at putting people down. He also had less hair, and he moved with precision. He was orderly, precise, and organized, and I was none of those things. I could see why I annoyed the hell out of him.

Yomawari, the night visits reporters made to cops at their homes, had become a daily part of my life. If I was lucky, after I bid my cop good night, I could go straight home; my report could wait to be written up in the morning. But most of the time, I'd have to go back to the Urawa office or the press club and type up sports records or other crap before going home to catch a few hours of sleep.

It was on one such night in January that Yamamoto and I found ourselves sitting around the office, eating leftover pizza, when The Cobra walked in; he was his usual subdued self but with an undercurrent of excitement. He would lay out the case for us but not before announcing, "Adelstein, this is supersecret stuff, so keep your big mouth shut."

• • •

According to Cobra's cop source, a dog breeder near Kumagaya by the name of Gen Sekine was under suspicion of being a serial killer. Sekine was a yakuza, an ex-yakuza, or a yakuza affiliate. In the previous ten years, several people associated with him had seemed just to disappear. There had been a Saitama police investigation when the first three people vanished, but all leads had dried up and nothing came of it. In fact, everyone had forgotten about the original case.

That all changed when Akio Kawasaki, the president of a waste management company, failed to come home. After several days, his wife went to the police. The police showed little interest and asked perfunctory questions: Has your husband exhibited any strange behavior lately? Were there problems at home? Has he ever gone away for a few days without notice? Does he have any enemies?

Mrs. Kawasaki's replies were negative, but in the course of the questioning, she mentioned her husband having had a disagreement with a dog breeder. Suddenly the officer in charge grew serious, even grave. "If your husband was involved with Sekine," he said, lowering his voice, "you should brace yourself for the worst."

Mrs. Kawasaki went home in shock. The police pulled a very cold case out of the morgue.

Two months later, Kawasaki was still missing, and the Saitama police homicide division officially set up a special task force to look into his disappearance. By the time Nakajima's source brought him into the loop, ten detectives were working on the case. Importantly, the source assured Nakajima that there was no rush to get the story into print. If the *Yomiuri* would wait patiently, we'd get the exclusive. Even the top brass at the Saitama police didn't know the details of the case yet, so there was little chance of the story leaking to other papers.

All this was pretty heady stuff. Dog breeders, yakuza, missing persons. It was right out of a bad Japanese TV movie. So, relying on

our TV detective instincts, we knew why the investigation was focusing not on missing persons or suspicion of murder or anything big-time like that but on the minor charge of fraud. The hurdle for getting a warrant for nonviolent crime was a lot lower than for homicide; once you had a suspect in custody you could interrogate him (or her) for any old thing, including murder. This was standard operating procedure for the homicide guys.

My assignment was to check the newspaper files for anything on the dog breeder or his pet shop, which had the catchy name of African Kennel. This was before the *Yomiuri* kept an electronic file of its past editions, so this meant going through scrapbooks the old-fashioned, easy-to-get-bored way. Finally, after two days of my eyes bugging out, I found a July 14, 1992, article with a headline that read, "Good-bye Dangerous Animal: Cute Lion Baby to Be Sent to Gunma Prefecture Zoo. Kumagaya Pet Breeder Caught Raising Lion on His Balcony."

Apparently, Sekine had been raising a lion cub on the balcony of his home when nervous neighbors called animal control. Raising wild animals at home was in violation of several city ordinances, so the cub was shipped to a zoo and Sekine was fined a pittance.

Finding this article was a breakthrough because, among other things, it confirmed the Chinese ideographs for Sekine's name. In Japanese, the pronunciation of a name alone doesn't necessarily help much. I once had to look for a Japanese woman whose name we had from her attendance at New York University; we knew the romanized spelling of her name and we knew her age, but there were several kanji variations of her last name and at least twenty kanji combinations for her first. If her romanized name was a misspelling foisted on her by an ignorant American or if the name was spelled in some esoteric way, you can imagine how helpful a database would be. You have to have the kanji to tell who's who. We could now look Sekine up in available databases using the ideographs.

Sekine, it turned out, was a pretty famous guy—in fact, he was one of the most successful dog breeders in the country. Featured in

magazines and television shows, he had single-handedly made the Alaskan malamute one of the most prestigious show dogs in Japan. He claimed in interviews to have lived in Africa, hunted animals in the bush, and stared down threatening tigers. Sekine was losing his hair, and what hair he still had was sprinkled with gray. His little beady eyes gave him a permanent squint, and the furrows in his forehead suggested deep contemplation. His raspy voice sounded as if he'd been smoking Golden Bats (the worst, sometimes best cigarette in Japan) since birth. He owned three shops and had announced plans to create a miniature safari park. In a news program he'd been on recently, he'd told the awestruck interviewer about jumping out of helicopters and wrestling lions to the ground. This is a guy, I thought, who could kill and not flinch.

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By the end of January, due mostly to Nakajima's work and leadership, we had gotten a handle on the cases of four people who were missing and believed to have been offed by Gen Sekine: Kawasaki, a housewife, a yakuza boss, and his driver. But we couldn't finger the motives.

Our *Yomiuri* team was conducting top secret research. Our plan was to hold off publishing anything until right before the arrest of the dog breeder. That plan fell apart on February 17.

I was at the Saitama police press club typing up some notes when Yamamoto returned from lunch and breathed into my face, reeking of kimchi. "I just had some delicious Korean barbecue," he said. "Adelstein, do you think I need a breath mint?" he asked.

"Yes, I think a breath mint might be advisable, Yamamoto-san."

"Okay, go buy me some," he said, handing me 200 yen.

I took the elevator to the basement convenience store, which was stocked with essentials for emergency situations exactly like this. I picked up a pack of Black-Black, the black supermint chewing gum

that turns your tongue and teeth black as well (I've never figured out the market for this), and as I was making my way back upstairs, my beeper went off. I dashed back to the press club, and Yamamoto, taking the Black-Black from me, stuck a copy of the sports newspaper *Asuka* in my face.

"Take a look," he said grimly. "The dog's out of the bag."

Indeed it was. A giant headline read: "Four People in Saitama Missing; Mysterious Dog Breeder Involved." There was even a chart of the victims—horribly incorrect, but still, there it was. We'd been scooped by the lowest of all media possible: a sports newspaper.*

"Call everyone and tell them to get to the Urawa office right away. There's going to be an emergency meeting in thirty minutes."

By the time we got to the office, Hara, the bureau chief, was huddled with the head editor, poring over the evening edition of *Asuka*. As we gathered around, Hara, with his large Buddha-like presence sucking up the air in the room, turned to Yamamoto and said loudly, "I thought we had this thing locked up?"

Yamamoto gulped, then began, "Well, the article isn't well researched. And *Asuka* is new to this game … no one reads it. It just wanted to make a splash. We should ignore it and keep working on our story."

"What's your take on it?" the head editor asked The Cobra.

The Cobra concurred with Yamamoto.

But the editor thought otherwise. "What happens if tomorrow every other newspaper in the country except us follows up on this story? We'll look like we've dropped the ball. How do we know the real competition isn't ahead of us on this one?"

"I don't think that's the case," Cobra replied demurely.

"You don't *think* that's the case? Do you *know* that's not the case? Are you willing to take the heat for a dropped story?"

Cobra was silent for a while, and I almost felt sorry for him. Then he piped up, "I think writing this up now is premature."

“Well, the story’s already out there. It’s pretty clear that we need to get on the wagon. Maybe things are moving faster than we like, but we have no choice. It’s time to stop discussing and start writing. The bureau chief for this region is going to be breathing down my neck any second now.”

I was listening to all this, and in a moment of rare bravery as a newbie reporter, I raised my hand, ignoring Yamamoto’s fervent gestures indicating that I should keep my mouth shut. “May I say something?” I said.

“Who asked you?” The editor brushed the air with his hand in the typical Japanese fuck-off sign.

Hara intervened. “Jake, say what’s on your mind.”

“Well,” I began, my voice cracking, “we’ve kind of made a deal with the Saitama police. They’ve been giving us everything in exchange for us sitting on the story. When the time comes for the arrest, they’ll give us the exclusive. That was the deal. If we break that deal, we lose their trust and we break our promise.”

“Good point, Jake,” Hara said, nodding. “But the landscape has changed. There’s already a story out there.”

“It’s in a paper nobody reads, with no credibility, and it’s way wrong. There’s a huge difference between us writing it and them writing it,” I said, echoing previously stated sentiments. “If we write this story now, we may win the battle, but we’ll lose the war.”

Hara pondered these words for a bit. No one wanted to speak. Hara looked at the article, shifted his weight back and forth. Then he sighed. “I don’t think we can ignore this. I know the police. They’ll be a little upset, but they’ll get over it. Let’s get to work. We need this for the morning edition.”

With that the meeting adjourned. The Cobra cornered me in the hallway, and I thought I was about to get yelled at again. Instead he said, “Thanks for saying that. You understand more about the police beat than I thought. You’re still sloppy, your writing is horrible, and you are undisciplined, but you’ve got some good instincts. You may not be a lost cause.”

“Thanks,” I said, trying to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

“Hey, no problem.”

Yamamoto was in the back of the office. “Adelstein, you’re right,” he said quietly to me while shuffling through pages. “Going ahead with this is a terrible idea. But that’s how it breaks sometimes. From this point, this is going to be the most important story we’re working on, so I’m assigning everyone a victim. Your job is to find out everything there is to know about your victim, how he knew Sekine, when he was last seen alive, what kind of person he was, why he might have been killed, and anything else that will come in useful down the road. That means we need pictures, comments, testimony, everything we can get. You’re the guy covering the Saitama Organized Crime Control Bureau. That means you’re a natural for the yakuza Endo and his driver Wakui. Both have been missing. From tomorrow, your life is Endo’s life.”

That’s how my Year of the Dog began.

Our first article on the Saitama Dog Lover Serial Disappearances appeared on the morning of February 19, running under a four-column headline: “Several Dog Lovers Missing in Saitama from April to August. Trouble over Sales.” The article came out in the morning, and the other papers scrambled to catch up after the article appeared. Everyone now knew that the *Yomiuri* had the lead on this case.

Unfortunately, however, we completely alienated the police by publishing the article, which had to have tipped off Sekine that he was under investigation. That would make him less likely to show his hand and give him a greater incentive to destroy evidence.

We’d effectively broken our promise, and the police were not forgiving. The chief detective made that clear to The Cobra in no uncertain terms, and Yokozawa, the gentlemanly head of the forensic department, put the *Yomiuri* on his personal shit list. They didn’t care about other newspapers, which were also following up on the story; they cared that we were the first legitimate newspaper

to break the not-ready-to-be-known news. In their eyes, we were completely to blame if anything went wrong.

Nonetheless, that same day, I made my first trip down to the town of Konan and began looking for more information on Endo. Konan was a throwback to the sixties. It had one giant Zexel factory, a golf course, a town hall, an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school. It had one grocery store and a family restaurant. Other than that, there were lots of empty fields, a little agriculture, and not much to do. It did have a temple devoted to the Buddha of Wisdom (Monju) that was kind of famous. If there was a downtown, I couldn't find it.

I started making inquiries at the fire department, since I had always found firemen to be more talkative than cops, and this is what I learned. Until he vanished, Endo was the number two man in an organized crime gang known as the Takada-gumi (under a man with the name of Takada). The gang was a third-tier group in the Inagawa crime family. I had expected that people, if they talked at all, would regard Endo with a mixture of dread and awe; but no, everyone spoke well of him. In fact, they seemed worried for his welfare.

A firefighter told me, "Endo's a great guy. He wasn't always a yakuza. Used to drive a truck. I actually voted for him in the 1984 mayoral elections. Politicians are all corrupt anyway. You might as well have one you know is corrupt from the start. Maybe he'll surprise you and do something honest."

I was taking notes as fast as I could. What kind of crazy town was this where the local yakuza runs for mayor? Apparently, not as crazy as I first thought. Endo had received only 120 votes, losing by a landslide. At the town hall, I got a copy of the photo Endo had submitted as a candidate when he ran for office. He looked tough. He had the dead calm eyes of a potentially explosive yakuza and the punch perm hairstyle that rural yakuza seemed fond of. It looked as if his nose had been broken several times. You'd have to be pretty powerful to kill this guy.

I took a taxi to where Endo had lived. The neighborhood was quiet, and the house was a beautiful semitraditional spread. The gate was open, so I stepped in to look more closely at the mail overflowing his mailbox. I was just getting a peek when someone came up behind me.

It was a little old man, completely bald and so thin his skin seemed translucent. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt, even though it was still quite cold. In bright green lettering, in English, the T-shirt said obscene things.

“What are you doing?” he asked nonchalantly.

“I’m looking for Yasunobu Endo. This is his house, isn’t it?”

“It’s his house, but he’s not ever coming home.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because he’s dead,” he said, matter-of-factly. “Kennel chopped him up, ground him into mincemeat, and fed him to the dogs. Everybody in town knows that.”

“Is that so? You wouldn’t happen to have witnessed that happening, would you?”

“Nope. Didn’t see a thing, but I know a thing or two. I know this town, and I know Endo, and I know Kennel.”

“You mean Gen Sekine?”

“I forget Kennel’s real name. Can I ask a question?”

“Shoot.”

“Why are you looking for Endo?”

I stepped back onto the street to continue our conversation. “I’m a newspaper reporter. When people, even yakuza, go missing, it’s news. I want to find out why he went missing.”

“He’s not missing, he’s mincemeat, he’s dog shit now.”

“You keep saying that. If everyone knows Kennel killed him, why haven’t the police arrested him?”

“Because they need evidence, you fool. Knowing something and proving it are two different things. If you are a reporter as you say,

you should know that."

"I'm a young reporter," I said. "I'm still learning." I handed him my meishi; he glanced at it and stuffed it into his back pocket.

I kept up my tough line of questioning. "Why would Kennel kill Endo? What was the motive?"

"Oh, that," the man said as he pulled a pack of Golden Bats from out of his sock and lit up. He took a drag so deep that half the cigarette burned into ash in seconds, held the smoke in, and then exhaled.

"Endo's a yakuza. Yakuza like scary things, and they like to scare people. So Kennel, he'd sell scary animals to the yakuza. Tigers, lions, things to scare the hell out of normal people. Kennel got his start dealing pets to the yakuza."

"And why would he kill Endo?"

"Don't know. Maybe Kennel was born vicious, like a rabid dog. So that's what he does. He kills people. Endo must have got in his way."

"And how could he kill a big guy like Endo?"

"Maybe he took a syringe of poison and just jabbed it in Endo's neck. *Thwock!* I saw him kill a dog that way once. It was a big dog. Long time ago I used to work for Kennel. Not anymore. He's a bad man. Does bad things. Endo was a yakuza, but for a yakuza not so bad."

It was two in the afternoon. There wasn't another person on the street; not a soul except for me and this old geezer. Endo's house was quiet and dark. Nobody was home. In fact, the place looked abandoned.

The geezer lived three houses down from Endo, and he seemed eager to talk but not in what you'd call a forthcoming way.

"Can you remember the last time you saw Endo alive?"

"Can't say that I do."

"Have any idea when he vanished?"

“That I do.”

“You do?”

“Yes, that is so.”

“So what can you tell me?”

“I remember the last time I didn’t see him alive.”

“You saw him dead?”

“You’re not listening to me, reporter boy. I said I remember the last time I didn’t see him alive.”

“Okay, when was that?”

“It was the morning of July 22, last year.”

“You remember the day—why?”

“Because that was the day Endo promised to drive me to the hospital for my heart medicine and the guy never showed up. Endo or that driver of his, Wakui, nice kid, sometimes used to give me a lift to the hospital. I wrote it down on my calendar. When he didn’t show up, I was pissed off. I need my medicine. I was going to give him a piece of my mind the next time I saw him. Don’t make promises you can’t keep, I say. If a man makes a promise, a man’s gotta keep that promise.”

“So you never saw him after that?”

“Nope, but another guy in the Takada-gumi told me that Endo and Kennel were fighting about something. And that’s when I knew that Endo had to be dead. Probably the kid too. A damn shame. I told the police Kennel must’ve whacked them.”

This was good stuff, I was thinking. With this we could narrow down the period when Endo had vanished. I was scribbling notes when the old guy suddenly dropped his cigarette and stepped on it, reopened Endo’s gate, walked to the overflowing mailbox, pulled out everything with his bony hands, and came back to where I stood.

“You wanted this, right?” he asked.

Of course I wanted it. “I can’t take this,” I said. “It’s stolen.”

“Well, you didn’t steal it. Because this mail doesn’t belong to anybody. Dead guys don’t read their mail, and the post office doesn’t reroute the stuff to Hell. So take it. Maybe you’ll find something.” He shoved it into my hands.

“Well,” I said, stuffing the mail into my backpack, “I’ve got to get running. Thanks for everything.”

The old guy stood in the middle of the road and lit another cigarette. I started to get back into the waiting taxi but stopped and asked him, “You know anybody else who might know anything about Endo or when he disappeared?”

“Ask his girlfriend. I can’t remember whether or not she’s still going to high school. If she is, you could catch her there. Name’s Yumi-chan.”

“Yumi-chan?”

“She’s a hottie,” he said.

“Do you need to go to the hospital today?” I asked him.

“Yep.”

“Okay.” I gave him a lift. It seemed like the thing to do.

The homicide division was moving at a glacial pace, the white-collar crimes unit wasn’t happy about getting stuck arresting Sekine for fraud, and it wasn’t until late May that I got bit by the dog case again.

It was at a drunken yomawari with a contact in the Organized Crime Division. The cop was grumbling about some injustice. “Those shitheads took the best fucking cop we have in the division and put him on that dog breeder case. Do they bother to ask me first? ’Course not, not when we really could use him ourselves …”

My antennae went up. “Who’s the cop? A lieutenant or something?”

“No, he’s barely a detective. A real outsider kind of guy. Doesn’t like to take the tests. But he can break a suspect better than anyone

on the force. Hah, maybe it's because he looks just like a yakuza—and not a *chinpira* [yakuza punk] either; looks likes a boss! He lives out in Konan. Hah, probably even went to school with Takada!"

"He'd be a great guy to know."

"Why don't you go visit him? He won't bite. Just be polite. Don't tell him I sent you, though."

"What should I tell him?"

"Tell him someone in homicide leaked his name to your boss. He hates working with those homicide guys anyway, so you won't have to give up any names because you can blame your boss. Tell him that the homicide guys gave his name to your boss."

"What's his name?"

"Sekiguchi."

Yamamoto was extremely pleased to hear I'd found a new source. We were still on the police shit list, so every little bit helped.

"You did good, Adelstein. But if you're going to get this cop to talk, you need a strategy. Does he have kids?"

"I don't know. I think so. I think somebody said something about daughters."

"Good. Take ice cream."

"Weather's warming up. Ice cream will get all messy."

"Buy some dry ice, idiot."

"Why ice cream? Just because kids are supposed to like it?"

"No, no, no. It's a Trojan horse, Adelstein. It gets you in the door. If the cop's not home, you can say to the wife, 'Oh, I brought this ice cream for him. Could you please put it in the freezer so it doesn't melt?' If he's home, he may take the ice cream and invite you in. If the kids see the ice cream, they're going to want some. They may decide they like you. If they do, you've nailed the wife."

"You want me to have sex with the wife?"

“No, get on good terms with the wife. Work on your Japanese, Jake. Trust me. If you’re going to take something with you, ice cream is good. Remember, you’re imposing on these cops. They aren’t obligated to talk to us at all. So acknowledge this. No good police reporter shows up empty-handed, not the first time and not the last time.”

“Uhh, can I expense it?”

“This comes out of your own pocket. Everybody pays their own sources.”

The curse of the police beat: the *Yomiuri* raises your pay, but it never matches the hours you work. You have a very limited expense account, and the better you get at your job, the more you spend on wining, dining, and gifts to the cops. Even the Yomiuri Giants baseball tickets, which everyone thought we got for free, we paid for out of pocket. The more sources you had, the more expenses you had. So it went.

But I followed Yamamoto’s advice to the letter. I went to the supermarket and bought the biggest tub of Häagen-Dazs chocolate I could find and arrived at the interrogator’s house at seven in the evening. It was at the back of an empty field, and it looked more like a shack than a house, with a little porch. The night was pitch-black. After living in the city for months, it was a shock to see the night sky and hear the sounds of leaves rustling. The smell of vegetation and damp leaves wafted through the air like raw incense.

I had the driver wait far out of sight. As I approached the house, I felt nervous, as I always did on a first yomawari, which was worse when you’d never even met the guy you were going to cuddle up to. I likened it to a blind date with a female kickboxer.

As I rang the doorbell, I could hear children laughing. Perfect. Mrs. Sekiguchi came to the door and turned on the porch light. Two little girls materialized on either side of her, sticking their heads out, full of curiosity at the apparition standing before them.

“I apologize for coming so late in the evening. My name is Jake Adelstein, with the *Yomiuri Shinbun,”* I said in perfectly polite

Japanese and handed her my card.

She looked confused. “Umm, we already subscribe to the *Yomiuri.”*

“Thank you,” I said, bowing as a good company man should. “Actually, I’m a reporter. I was hoping for the chance to speak with your husband.”

“Oh? Let me see if he’ll talk to you.”

She ducked indoors as the two girls stepped out onto the porch. *“What* are you?” asked the littler one.

“Don’t you mean *who* are you?” I corrected her.

She stood her ground. “No, I mean *what* are you? You’re obviously not human.”

“He might be human,” her sister said.

I didn’t know how to respond to this line of conversation. “Why do you think I’m not human?”

The little sister answered immediately. “You have pointed ears and a nose so big that you can’t be human.”

“Well, then,” I asked, “what am I?”

Little Sister came closer and stared up at my face. “You have a big long nose and pointed ears and big round eyes too. You are pretending to speak Japanese like a human being. You must be a *tengu* [Japanese goblin].”

Big Sister shook her head. “Chi-chan, he has only one pointed ear. And his skin isn’t bright red. Just pink. But definitely he has a tengu nose.”

Chi-chan asked me to bend down so she could touch my nose. I did. Without a moment’s hesitation she stuck a finger in each of my nostrils and pulled down hard; I almost fell over. She wiped her fingers on her jeans and scratched her head. Then she clapped her hands. “I know! You’re half tengu and half human. What do you think, Yuki-chan?”

Before Yuki-chan could offer her informed judgment on the state of my being, Mrs. Sekiguchi returned. “My husband doesn’t want to talk to any reporters. I’m sorry,” she said apologetically.

“I understand,” I replied. “I usually cover organized crime for the newspaper, and I know a lot of police are not comfortable talking with the press. Sometimes, believe it or not, I personally can be useful to them.”

Mrs. Sekiguchi laughed. “Well, maybe next time.”

I handed her my bag of ice cream. “This will never survive the trip back to Urawa, so please take it. It’s already starting to melt. I’m sure Chi-chan and Yuki-chan will like it.”

I said good-bye to the kids, wiggling my half-tengu ear at them, and walked slowly back to where the car was parked. I was halfway across the field when I heard a deep booming voice call out, “Yomi-san [as in “Mr. Yomiuri”], wait up!”

I turned around to see a tall, imposing figure in jeans and T-shirt standing on the porch. It was Sekiguchi. I headed back his way.

“Thanks for the ice cream,” he said as he shook my hand firmly. “There’s too much for four people. You might as well come in and have some.”

Sekiguchi had deep-sunken eyes with solid black irises, high cheekbones, and a pronounced nose that you could see had been broken. He had his hair cut short, a little longer on top, giving him the appearance of a fifties biker. He motioned me inside.

The kids and Mrs. Sekiguchi were sitting on the living room floor with their feet under the blanket of a low table. Mrs. Sekiguchi had my meishi out before her, and the two girls had what looked like homework spread out over the table. Sekiguchi brought in five bowls of ice cream and set them on the table.

I handed him the beer I’d brought as backup.

“Oh, thanks!” he said, taking the beer into the kitchen. He sat down and then, as if he’d just remembered something, asked, “I’m sorry, did you want a beer?”

“I’m fine, thank you. But you don’t drink beer?” I asked.

“No, not at home. It sets a bad example for the kids.”

He lit a cigarette and offered me one too. I gladly accepted, needing to do something with my hands.

“I thought the typical American didn’t smoke anymore?” he said.

“I’m not a typical American.”

“I noticed.”

“How did you know I’m American?”

He took a drag. “I remember you. You were there taking photos when we busted that Sumiyoshi-kai fake political organization.”

“Yeah, I was there. I don’t remember seeing you, though,” I said, then dared to say what came out of my mouth next. “Maybe I thought you were another yakuza.”

Happily for me, he laughed. “Yeah, I get that a lot. In this town, I could have gone either way.”

From then on, Sekiguchi controlled the conversation, asking questions about me and my background, my life up to entering the *Yomiuri*. He was a good listener. He was either really interested or really good at feigning interest. After we finished the ice cream, he thanked me again.

“That was delicious. Your technique is good, and your approach is decent. You figured this would get you in the door, and you were right. The question that remains is: can I trust you, and should I trust you?”

“Yes, that is the question, isn’t it?”

“How did you get my name?”

I had to think about how to answer. I didn’t want to come off false, but I didn’t want to give everything away. “You know that I cover organized crime. That’s my beat within the police beat.”

“But you’re here because I’m working the dog breeder case.”

I nodded. “That’s right. I cover organized crime, and you’re handling the missing yakuza guy, or so I hear.”

He nodded, then said, “But you aren’t answering my original question. How did you get my name and address?”

“If I tell you, how can you trust me? How can you know that I won’t drop your name with the wrong person? Conversely, even if I tell you, how do I know you won’t flush out my source and get him in trouble for leaking information?”

Sekiguchi laughed. “Good answer. You’re well trained. All right. I won’t ask for a name. But give me a hint. I promise you that I won’t hold it against you, and I won’t go looking for who told you about me. I’m just curious.”

“So you’re asking me to trust you?”

“It’s a mutual thing.”

“All right. I have no loyalty to the homicide squad. They aren’t my beat. Someone on the case gave your name to my boss. He won’t tell me who it was, and I would never ask.”

Sekiguchi curled his lip and stubbed out his cigarette, chuckling.

“Those guys spend eighty percent of their time trying to figure out how to keep the press off the scent and from fucking up the investigation. Of course, they’re all leaking information right and left to their favorite reporters, especially to the cute female ones. So what do you want to know?”

I wasn’t expecting this. Actually, I’d never been grilled like this by a cop before. This was new territory for me.

“What can you tell me about Endo?” I started. “And what can you tell me about Gen Sekine?”

“What do you know about Endo?”

I told him everything I knew. Sekiguchi offered me another cigarette, and we both lit up again.

“What should I call you? I’m sure as hell not going to call you *Aderusutain* every time.”

“Jake works.”

“Jake-san? Jake-kun?”

“Just Jake is fine.”

“Okay. Well, it’s getting late. So I’ll tell you what I know, with a caveat.”

“Name it.”

“A lot of this information is ground level. If you take it and run it past the guys at the top, they won’t know it since they don’t have it yet, but they’ll be puzzled that you have it and they’ll go down the food chain looking for the leak. If you don’t know this already, you should. You have to wait for information to go all the way up to the top before double-checking it. Otherwise, you burn your sources. Do you understand that?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Good. I’ll tell you what I know, but how you handle the information will be a litmus test of your reliability. Got that?”

“Got it.”

“There’s no question that Sekine killed Endo, and it’s our strongest case. I think we should bust him on charges of murder right from the start; no fucking around. He’ll break quickly. I know that. Obviously, since I’m not a member of the killer-catcher elite, no one is listening to me, but they will eventually.

“From the investigation so far, I would say that Sekine has killed eight people. The murder of Endo is the one with the strongest circumstantial evidence and hearsay. We have witnesses who can testify, after a fashion, that Endo met Sekine right before he vanished and that on that day Sekine ‘injured’ him. I won’t elaborate.” Sekiguchi was full of confidence.

I asked how a dog breeder like Sekine had become so well entrenched with the yakuza.

“Before Sekine came to Konan, he got in big trouble with the Yamaguchi-gumi over money. He himself used to be in another yakuza group, the Kyokuto-kai. When he got here, a customer introduced him to the Takada-gumi, who put him under its wing. As a gesture of thanks, he gave Takada, the boss, an incredibly

expensive dog. That was the beginning of his connections with the Inagawa-kai crime group. He proceeded to become the exotic pet supplier to the yakuza, selling vicious dogs and wild beasts to any yakuza who had the money. They love that kind of crap. It heightens their image as tough guys. He sold a lion—a goddamn lion—to one group. It's still alive. But this Kennel guy, which everybody calls him, doesn't *like* animals; he admires them, sort of, and he uses them.

"I'll give you an example. A couple months ago, Kennel and this customer were arguing over the price of a dog. The negotiations were going nowhere. So picture this: They are standing there in Kennel's store. At their feet, tongue hanging from its mouth, is a pure-bred Alaskan malamute. The customer won't budge. He tells Sekine he's not going to pay the one and a half million yen the breeder wants; he asks once more to have a half million yen taken off the price.

"'You want a five hundred thousand yen discount?' Sekine mutters, smiling as he strokes the dog in front of him. Then he picks up a pair of grooming scissors from his desk, cuts off the dog's left ear in one snip, and tosses it at the feet of the customer. 'Okay,' he says, 'you win. I've taken it off.' The guy paid the price and took the dog and left. Because I'm sure he was thinking, The next ear lying at my feet might not be the dog's.

"Is that something a normal person would do? Kennel has this thing for animals because he thinks they have no conscience and they act purely on instinct. He wants to be an animal like that."

The evening having had its share of startling revelations, Sekiguchi walked me to the door. As I was preparing to leave, he put a firm hand on my shoulder, stopping me. I turned around. Had I made some kind of terrible faux pas?

He looked me in the eyes and pointed down at my feet. "Your socks don't match; do you know that?" he asked.

I got back to Saitama around midnight. Yamamoto was waiting for me.

“How’d it go?” he asked.

“It went all right,” I replied. “He was really tight-lipped, didn’t say anything other than that he was working on the case. But I did get in the house.”

“Excellent,” said Yamamoto.

I hadn’t told Yamamoto the truth because even though I trusted him I didn’t trust The Cobra. I’d taken Sekiguchi’s warning seriously: I didn’t want my notes being pulled up the food chain too soon and Sekiguchi having to pay for it. This was the first time I realized that to protect your sources, you sometimes have to keep things from the people you work with. Later, I’d learn that sometimes you have to keep things from the people you love as well.

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* Sports newspapers in Japan, available at all kiosks in train stations, are barely short of being supermarket tabloids. Their emphasis is on sports, so there’s a semblance of truth telling, but their mainstream news coverage is drawn to the gory, the disgusting, and the merely gossipy. Sports newspapers are also distinguished by their “pink pages”—daringly salacious photos and drawings, erotic fiction, information on sex clubs and massage parlors, and ads for those establishments. On occasion, apparently, they report on crime.

The Saitama Dog Lover Serial Disappearances, Part Two:

Out of Bed, Yakuza Are Worthless Leeches

After many months on the case, I began thinking back to recruiting day and how the presenter had said a story can take up to a year to build. Back then I'd thought that that would be excellent; now I was in terrible need of a break and at the end of my rope.

I mentioned to Sekiguchi that I was taking a week off.

"It's not going to happen," he laughed.

He was right; I was back within four days. A member of the Takada-gumi, a chinpira named Shimizu, had cornered Sekine at his African Kennel shop and slashed him up, and Sekiguchi was in charge of interrogating the suspect.

I was having Häagen-Dazs with the girls when the good interrogator got home, took off his shoes, and sat down at the table with us. It was uncanny; it seemed the most natural thing in the world to be sitting there.

Sekiguchi asked his wife for coffee.

"Does Shimizu think Sekine killed Endo?" I blurted out without hesitation. The kids were there, but they were paying us no attention.

"He does. He does. He admitted to taking a box cutter to Sekine's face but not to anything else. So after we were done writing out his confession and he signed it, I took him aside and said to him, 'I'm done questioning you and I'm not rewriting your statement, but tell me straight: Did you do this because Takada ordered you to?' And Shimizu said no. Completely denied it."

Sekiguchi continued, “I wanted to hear about this from the man himself, so I went and paid Takada a visit, as I do every so often, sort of to keep things under control. I asked him directly if he’d put that idiot up to it. Takada didn’t bat an eye. ‘If I told the punk to snuff him and he came back without seriously injuring the jerk,’ he said, ‘I would’ve strung him up. Shimizu is a total fuckup. He’s no yakuza. If he was going to do it, he should’ve buried the knife in the dog man’s gut.”

At that point, Sekiguchi decided to give me a little background. “A lot of yakuza don’t even like to call themselves yakuza. Forget about the official word *boryokudan* [literally, “violent groups”]. They call themselves gokudo. You know that, right?” He wrote the Chinese characters down on a napkin. *“Goku* means ‘ultimate, the far end, the extreme,’ and *do* means ‘the path.’ A gokudo goes all the way, he doesn’t hold back, he finishes the job. These young guys today, they don’t deserve to call themselves gokudo. They’re just chinpira, going through the motions of being a man.

“My job is to make sure it looks as if we’re doing everything we can to keep Sekine alive, to make Takada’s boys believe that if something happens to Sekine, the law’s going to come down heavy on them. Crazy, but I do all this so that Takada doesn’t lose face and decide to knock off Sekine himself.”

Sekiguchi was walking a tightrope. Yet in many ways he was holding the entire investigation together. When Endo had first disappeared, everyone whispered that Kennel had done it, but Takada had refused to listen. He couldn’t believe that a civilian, no matter how much out of control, would take out a yakuza. It was unheard of. However, since Sekiguchi had been assigned to the case, Takada, it seems, was slowly rethinking his position. He wasn’t sure why; all he knew was that he wasn’t happy about the way things were beginning to stack up.

Takada would call Sekiguchi off and on and say casually, “I think I’m going to blow some holes in Kennel. This case is a waste of your talents. I’ll put an end to it for you. You’ll be working better cases in no time.” Sekiguchi would then politely ask him to refrain from

killing the main suspect. It was kind of a two-man comedy routine after a while.

No one knew how or where Endo had been taken out. But Sekiguchi had been able to trace his last night up to his disappearance. At 9 P.M., after some illegal gambling recreation, Endo had called Yumi-chan. The call was short and to the point: "I'm going to be a little late."

Sekiguchi had scored one other key piece of information: a local veterinarian had sold Sekine a large amount of strychnine nitrate—so he could put sick animals to sleep.

• • •

I had been doing my own looking into Endo's final hours, and before long I found myself at Sekiguchi's house every other day, crosschecking information that I'd dug up. This was probably pushing the limits of professional courtesy, but, oddly, Sekiguchi didn't seem to mind. In the meantime, Mrs. Sekiguchi even started asking me to babysit the girls while she ran errands; I ended up helping them with their English homework.

Sekiguchi eventually tracked down Yumi-chan. She was not in high school but working as a bar hostess, so Yoshihara and I headed over to the bar the next evening. We were greeted by the mama-san, who, after Yoshihara requested Yumi-chan's company, sat us down at a table.

The place was a typical hostess club: a chandelier, a few sofas for intimate chat, a karaoke machine, a big guy behind the bar. The upholstery was purple velvet, the light in the place so dim that the candles on the tables seemed like spotlights, and the guy behind the bar, who gave me the once-over, had no neck, a short haircut, and a bad suit that was too tight—yakuza alert.

Yumi, on the other hand, was gorgeous. She had a longish face and perky little lips, and she seemed to be a little shorter than me but not by much. I imagined I could see some lace showing from under her miniskirt, but I couldn't be sure. She sat herself down

next to Yoshihara, while her colleague, introduced as Kimiko, squeezed in next to me.

As Yoshihara sipped the whiskey and water that Yumi had poured for him, he quietly explained who we were and why we were there. She was immediately alarmed, and for a second I worried she'd tell the bartender to throw our sorry asses out of the club. But after the initial nervousness she seemed to respond to Yoshihara's direct approach.

Sighing, she said, "I'll tell you what I can, but not for free. This is a bar; this is where I work. If you're a customer, you can ask whatever you want. But I expect you to behave like a good customer. Like the kind that buys a girl a bottle of champagne."

Yoshihara and I looked at each other. Could we afford this? Besides the issue of not being able to expense it, buying information outright was verboten. This came pretty close to the line.

Impulse intervened. "I think that would be fine," I said. "But one thing you should know is I'm Jewish, and we have a two-thousand-year tradition of being very cheap. I would hate to dishonor tradition. How about a cheap bottle of champagne?"

Yumi laughed gamely, but she didn't relent. "You're in Japan now. Time to learn Japanese tradition."

We ordered a bottle of good champagne. As the bubbly flowed, so did information. Endo had been a regular at the club and he'd been a real gentleman. He was older, but he'd wined and dined her and bought her lavish gifts, and he had a certain animal magnetism. She'd slept with him out of curiosity, then found out he was good in bed.

The last she'd heard from him was that final phone call. She had no idea who he was going to meet; in fact, she rarely discussed work with him. Now that he was gone, she missed him, but she'd never been in love with him. One bad thing about him was that he was covered in tattoos, and that made his skin cold. "Sometimes it felt like I was sleeping with a snake. Good in summer, not in winter."

My attention was beginning to wander. Kimiko wasn't as attractive as Yumi, but she had lovely eyes—*penetrating* would be the word. She smiled a lot and had wide, shapely hips. She filled my champagne glass and asked me if I wanted a cigarette. I said sure, and she removed a slender cigarette from her pack, put it between her lips, lit it, inhaled, and then gently inserted the cigarette between my lips—eyes on me the whole time. I couldn't stop looking at her fingernails; they were jet black. Wow.

"Would you like to ask me anything?" she said. "Your friend seems to be asking all the questions."

"Did you know Endo?" I said agreeably, coming to my senses.

"Oh, I knew Endo. Not as well as Yumi, of course. I like yakuza. They know how to please a woman in bed. Out of bed, yakuza are worthless leeches."

"Have you dated a lot of yakuza?"

"I was the mistress of a yakuza before I moved here."

"And why aren't you his mistress anymore?"

She lit a cigarette for herself. "He died."

"Natural causes?"

"Definitely natural causes," she said, then laughed hysterically. "We were fucking when he kicked the bucket." She wasn't kidding. They'd been going at it heatedly, and in the middle of the act he'd had a heart attack. She'd managed to push him off her while he was still breathing, but he was dead before the ambulance arrived. Dead at forty-five. He'd been abusive and possessive, convincing her to get a dragon tattoo on her back. He had one himself. It was like branding her, but she didn't mind. She was eighteen, and she thought she loved him. He was married, of course. Before the ambulance arrived, she had the presence of mind to remove his bank card from his wallet. The next morning she cleaned out his account.

When at age twenty-two she moved to Saitama, she had a tidy little nest egg.

We could afford only so much conversation, and before long Yoshihara made motions that it was time to leave. I thanked Kimiko for her company. Yumi and Kimiko waved good-bye at the door after we settled our bill—30,000 yen (around $300).

Out on the sidewalk, I bid Yoshihara good night, telling him I'd find my own way home. Yoshihara hailed a taxi, and as soon as the car was out of sight, I turned around and immediately reentered the bar and continued my conversation with Kimiko. I'd never known a yakuza woman before, and I wasn't about to pass up the opportunity.

I never made it back to the offices that night.

I suppose it would reflect better upon the man in me if I said I talked her into our spending the night together, but she was in charge all the way. And in bed she was ferocious, aggressive, definitely more experienced than me. In addition to the tattoo of a dragon on her back, she had one of the Kanon Bosatsu (the female Buddha of compassion), which seemed to jump out of her skin when we were having sex.

And so began what I can only describe as a several-months-long three-way affair. Not the three-way you're thinking of: Kimiko gave me information about the gokudo world, which I then shared with Sekiguchi, who was keeping tabs on the Takada-gumi, about which he fed bits and pieces to me.

On one afternoon, as Kimiko and I were in her apartment having stand-up sex, she endearingly ran her fingernails down my back and asked me if I wanted to know a secret.

"Sure," I said, "tell me a secret."

"Guess where Sekine is right now?"

"Working hard at his kennel, I assume."

"I don't think so."

"Okay, give me the scoop."

“First you have to earn it.”

So I did. And, my part of the bargain fulfilled, she fulfilled hers: “Takada has him. They’re probably interrogating him right now.”

“What the fuck?”

“Oh, they’ll get the truth out of him.”

“How do you know about this?”

“One of Takada’s boys was in the bar last night, bragging about it. He said they were going to get Sekine, cut him up, and feed him to his own dogs. Something about his own medicine.”

“I need your phone.”

“Who are you going to call?”

“Just give me the phone.”

I rang Sekiguchi, who listened, thanked me, didn’t ask questions, and hung up immediately.

I didn’t speak to him again until four days later. In the meantime, thanks to Kimiko, I managed to track down one of Endo’s non-yakuza friends and get more information on Endo. Apparently, he had been blackmailing Sekine and planning to strip him of all his assets—land, house, kennel, everything.

Sekiguchi was happy to see me.

“Jake, thanks for the call the other day. Your information was very good.”

“What happened?”

“About ten minutes after I got off the phone with you, Takada called me, acting coy, trying to surprise me. I didn’t give him a chance. I asked him what the hell he was doing with Sekine—Sekine was supposed to be hands-off. Takada was very impressed that I already knew. He told me, ‘Yeah, I’ve got the motherfucker. I’m going to ask him a few questions, and you’re welcome to sit on the sidelines and listen.’ Tempting offer, but I declined. I told him he better not kill the guy and he had to let me know what he learned.”

“You didn’t rush in to rescue him?”

“No. Takada gave me his word.”

“And you believed him?”

“You have to have faith in people sometimes, Jake. Sometimes you have to trust people who are untrustworthy. By trusting them, you make them trustworthy. I trusted Takada to honor his word when he gave it. If he hadn’t given me his word, I would have called up the Gyoda cops and had them come bail Sekine out. As it was, I decided to leave him with Takada for a while.”

“So what were the results?”

“According to Takada, the poor bastard cried like a baby but insisted he’d never touched Endo. For three hours they put the screws to him, and he didn’t admit a damn thing. Finally, Takada grabbed him by the throat and said, ‘Maybe you whacked Endo, maybe you didn’t. Either way, he’s no longer in this world. I can feel it. The least you owe the man is a prayer for his soul.’ Takada dragged Sekine in front of the small Buddhist shrine in the office. Sekine’s hands shook so bad he broke three sticks of incense before he could get the lighter to light it and stick it into the ash. Takada laughed, said it was quite a show.”

“If he won’t spill his guts to Takada, he’s not going to confess to the police,” I blurted out.

“About that,” said Sekiguchi, “you are wrong. But first, tell me how the hell you found out Takada snatched him?”

“A little bird told me.”

“A little bird?” Sekiguchi looked very serious for a second. Then he cleared his throat. “Look, Jake, we haven’t known each other for too long. I know that as a reporter you don’t give up your sources. I respect that. But now I need to know how you knew—not as reporter to cop but as man to man. It’s important. I won’t tell anyone, you have to trust me, but I need to know.”

I hesitated. Was this a test to see if I would protect my sources no matter what, or did he really mean what he said?

“Why do you need to know?”

“I need to make sure that what I tell you isn’t flowing back to Takada. I don’t think that would happen, but maybe you don’t know who’s talking to who. So tell me.”

“All right. I heard it from Kimiko.”

“Kimiko? From the bar where Yumi works?”

“Yes.”

“And what the hell were you doing with Kimiko on a Friday night?”

“A kind of date?”

Sekiguchi’s mouth dropped open. “You’re doing Kimiko? Jake, you really are an information whore.”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No, no, no. You’re single, it’s okay. But don’t forget she’s a yakuza woman. And she’s got a shabu habit.”

“Shabu?”

“Speed. Methamphetamine. She’s a junkie. So you’d better be using a skin. You could get hep C or worse.”

“I didn’t know that.”

“Well, be careful.”

“Should I not see her?”

“No, keep seeing her. Keep pumping her for information. Hell, pump her for anything you want. Just tell me what you find out.” He shook his head and offered me a cigarette, which I was happy to take.

I was learning a lot from Sekiguchi, most important that it’s the time you take when it seems unimportant that is the most important time of all. Sekiguchi, whenever he put a yakuza in jail, would always pay a visit to the guy’s family. He’d check up on them periodically, sometimes even buy them groceries or help the wife with house

repairs. He would contact the yakuza in the “pig house” (a euphemism for jail, *not* a typographical error) and let him know how things were going at home. He never made the crime and the criminal a personal thing. He was doing his job, and they were doing theirs.

The payoff for this extra effort was that when the yakuza returned to their lives outside prison, they were predisposed to leak information to Sekiguchi. Whether or not they picked up again with organized crime, they’d always have ties to yakuza and would pass things on to Sekiguchi. Thus he had built himself up a little yakuza information network. I decided I would emulate him to the best of my ability.

In July, Sekiguchi invited me to that wonderful tradition known as a family barbecue. This being Japan, it wasn’t hot dogs and it wasn’t beef, it was fish—small, sweet, fresh river fish known as *ayu*, skewered, rubbed with salt, grilled over charcoal, and dipped in an amazing green sauce. Delicious! As we sat on his porch drinking Cokes and eating whole fish on a stick, he offered me some more advice: “You have to plant the seeds when the ground is still half frozen to reap the spring harvest. Plant the seeds in spring.”

It was a little unusual for him to speak in metaphors, so I asked him to explain.

“Well, the dog breeder case is hot now, yeah, I know. But you shouldn’t be spending all your time on it. You should be hanging out with some other cops now too. Why? Because they don’t have any good cases. And because they have nothing to work with, they have plenty of time, and they probably wouldn’t mind your company. If you brought them something to work with, they’d love you.

“Visit your sources or your informants when nothing is going on. Then they’ll see you as a friend or a buddy and not a hungry opportunist. Familiarity breeds trust. You came pretty early on this case, before my name got out, so I let you in the door.”

He used his skewer to poke out the eyeball of a fish and offered it to me. I popped it into my mouth. Not bad. The two girls were watching and gave me a standing ovation, clapping wildly. Mrs. Sekiguchi offered me the eyeball from her fish; I politely declined. I'd had my quota for the day.

"Where do you think this case is going?" he asked.

I had no idea.

"The fraud case will fall apart. There are two people who probably know how Sekine killed Endo and Kawasaki, the waste management company president. That's Ryoji Arai, his so-called business associate, and Shima, Arai's driver. It's very simple. We find something to arrest those two for—God knows they've done some shady shit in their lives. We bounce them off each other until they cough up the information we want, and then we take down Sekine. If I was in charge, that's what I'd do. Unfortunately, I'm not in charge."

"Who is Arai, anyway? What's his connection to Sekine?"

"You're going to have to work on that one for yourself, Jake. I could spell it all out for you, but it'd be too easy. Ask around. You'll find out."

While I was screwing around with Kimiko and talking with Sekiguchi, the other *Yomiuri* reporters were doing a stellar job tracking down Sekine's less-than-stellar history. It seemed as though he'd always been in the orbit of the yakuza; even as a youngster he'd hung around the local gang's office and ran errands, though he'd never managed to become a full-fledged member.

His life was unremarkable until 1972, when he began dealing in exotic pets. Business boomed. Ups and downs followed; he married another "animal lover" in 1983 and settled down in Kumagaya, in the northern part of Saitama Prefecture. He cut down on expenses by making his own pet food, slaughtering the pigs and cattle himself and grinding up the offal for dog food. The blood that oozed into

the streets from the shop upset the neighbors, as did the animal carcasses that were thrown out with the other trash. But Sekine cleaned up his act, and the neighbors learned to live with it.

Back at the office, I compared notes with my colleagues. I found out that Ryoji Arai and Sekine went back ten years or so. Until recently, he'd been the PR guy for the African Kennel, then he and Sekine had had a falling-out—but not before Arai's wife went missing. Probably Arai killed her, and Sekine helped him get rid of the body.

From a police contact, I learned that Arai was a wanted man, a very wanted man. He had somehow managed to alienate members of the two biggest crime groups in Japan—the Inagawa-kai and the Sumiyoshi-kai—by hurting the dog of a member of the former and by making off with a large amount of money from the latter.

I found out from another source that there was a *zetsuenjo* out in Arai's name. When someone leaves the fold of an organized crime group, yakuza send out one of two kinds of letters to associated group members. A *hamonjo* (meaning "broken gate") says that the individual is no longer associated with the organization and advises the recipient of the letter not to give him shelter or do business with him. A zetsuenjo, like the one out on Arai, says that the individual has betrayed the organization, is no longer entitled to membership, and is being hunted down; sometimes it also asks for information on the whereabouts of said individual. It can be a "Wanted: Dead or Alive" poster that's circulated among the organized crime groups. This source allowed me to make a copy.

Armed with my copy of this unique document, I headed back to Sekiguchi's house. It was six on a hot, humid evening. I was wearing my summer suit, a silk tie, and dress shoes, looking very snazzy. My socks even matched.

As I walked up to the door, it opened on its own. Out came the four members of the Sekiguchi family, all in gray sweatsuits.

"Jake, you're just in time. Come jog with us."

"I'm in a suit."

“So what, you can still run. Come on.”

The kids pulled at my arm. “Come on, Jake. If you want to talk to our father, you have to run. Try and catch us!”

And with that they took off ahead of their parents. I didn’t really have a choice; I started jogging pathetically in my suit, trying to keep pace with Sekiguchi. Within ten minutes, the trail had taken us to the mountains. My only pair of dress shoes was about to become a casualty of duty.

“So,” said Sekiguchi, “find out anything about Arai?”

“Yes,” I panted. “I have his zetsuenjo right here.”

“Show it to me.”

I pulled it out of my pocket and held it up to Sekiguchi, who kept running while he read it.

“Excellent work, Jake. Good to see you doing something on your own. I won’t be around to spoon-feed you forever.”

“I wasn’t counting … on … it.” I was having trouble keeping up with the guy. How could he be smoking two packs a day and still be kicking my ass?

The kids weren’t cutting me any slack either. “Come on, Jake. Don’t be so slow.”

“Okay, let’s pick up the pace,” I said, trying to salvage some pride, and I ran ahead. Sekiguchi caught up with me in three easy strides.

“Out of shape, Jake? I may outlive you, boy.”

“I think you will.”

“So you wanna head back?”

“I wouldn’t mind.”

“Okay, meet you back at the house.”

“No way. I’m not giving up if you aren’t.”

“You sure?”

“Sure I’m sure,” I said, full of gasping bravado.

“Okay, then, I’ll show mercy,” Sekiguchi said. Calling the troops to him, he announced, “We’re turning around, going back home. And for Jake-kun, we walk: *one, two, three, four.”*

Briskly, Sekiguchi filled me in as I stuck next to him:

Arai and Sekine were business partners. But Arai was a greedy bastard. He’d sold an expensive dog to the head of one of the Sumiyoshi-kai groups and was supposed to care for it while the boss was traveling. Instead, he’d abandoned the dog and left town with money borrowed from the group to set up a business importing animals for pets. He also allegedly ran off with a couple million yen he’d borrowed from Takada.

When the Sumiyoshi boss returned and found his dog half dead, he was furious. He swore he’d hunt down Arai like a dog himself. Arai got spooked, took off into the boonies, changed his name, found religion, and started painting Buddhist art. A little while before, Arai had reemerged on the scene and seemed to be back working for Sekine. Maybe after years of living like a monk, he was overpowered by the smell of Sekine’s success. Then suddenly Arai was gone, nowhere to be found. He had to know something about the missing people around Sekine.

“So here’s the deal.” Sekiguchi turned to me, starting to get serious. “Nobody hears a word of this, understood? This is just between you and me. Because I kind of fucked this one up.”

“Understood.”

“All right. Arai owed Takada a couple million yen when he split. Everybody thought Arai got offed when he disappeared, but we knew better. When Arai comes on the scene again and then disappears, I go to Takada and I ask him if he knows anything about Arai.

“Takada answers, ‘Bastard better be dead.’

“I tell him, ‘Wrong. It looks like he’s alive and well.’ I was just planting a seed because I had no idea where the fuck Arai was, and I knew that if Takada thought Arai was still alive, he’d find him. The joke is, we find Arai first. He is completely broke; no way he can

pay back Takada what he owes. When Takada finds him, he's dead meat.

"I need Arai for other reasons, so I have to run down to see Takada and get him to pull back, tell him not to lay one finger on the loser.

"This then gets back to the Sumiyoshi-kai group that Arai pissed off, and they decide they're going to whack that dog-abusing deadbeat son of a bitch before Takada does. So, next thing, I'm trying to calm these guys down. In, like, a week I had to save this piece of shit's life twice.

"Man, trying to keep these animals under control ain't funny. I'm getting sick of it. If this investigation into Sekine doesn't work out, I don't think there's much I can do. Can't keep watch on the yakuza forever, trying to be reasonable with them."

I was a little puzzled. "Don't you think that it might be easier for everyone to take a long summer vacation and let Takada and the Sumiyoshi-kai know about it? Wouldn't that be a solution?"

"Hell, yes, I think about it all the time. Maybe justice would be served. The problem is, we owe this to the families of Sekine's victims. They would never get closure if we let Arai and Sekine die like that. They need to know the truth."

• • •

On September 2, I was in a love hotel in Omiya with Kimiko, she was massaging my back, and I was complaining about the lack of momentum in the dog breeder case.

"Well," she said, pushing her elbow into my shoulders, "why don't they get the tapes from Arai?"

"What tapes?"

Kimiko explained: Arai had bragged about the tapes to a yakuza buddy who was a regular at her bar and who'd shown up one night in a talkative mood. Arai had said he was safe, they couldn't touch him, he wasn't going to wind up like Endo because he had the goods

on Sekine, who had basically confessed to the murders on tape. Supposedly Shima, Sekine's driver, had helped get rid of Endo's body.

I didn't know what evidentiary value tapes like these would have, but it sounded pretty important. "I have to tell Sekiguchi about this," I said, getting up from the bed.

"Right now? You have to tell him right now?"

"Yes, this is important stuff."

"Suit yourself."

Sekiguchi answered the phone, and I started to relate the tale of the tapes when Kimiko, because she was miffed and because she had a bizarre sense of humor, yanked my pants down and began fellating me. This made carrying on a conversation a little hard to concentrate on, and I started talking as fast as I could: "… murders … body … Kimiko … me … you."

"If that's true, we have to pull in Arai right away. Good work, Jake. Anything else?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Are you all right? You're talking real fast."

"I'm fine. A little tired."

"Okay, take care of yourself," he said, then he hung up.

I couldn't, however, because Kimiko's ministrations had been keeping me on the edge. Three seconds later I was over that edge. I collapsed on the bed with the phone still in my hand, wanting now to go to sleep, but Kimiko was having none of it.

Honorable me, I knew I owed her. So I turned my beeper off for the first time in months.

• • •

At first Sekiguchi didn't know what to do with the sudden knowledge of the tapes' existence. If he told Takada, Takada would track down Arai, beat the tapes out of him, and then kill both Arai

and Sekine. It was one thing to suspect that Sekine had killed Endo, another to have his admission that he'd done it.

Sekiguchi decided to take the information to Takada's second in command, whom I'll just call the Consigliere, who listened to what Sekiguchi had to say and promised to take care of it quietly.

Things at this point started to move quickly.

In no time at all, the Consigliere found Arai, who for some reason became willing to talk. The Consigliere had made no mention of the tapes—didn't need to—to his boss Takada.

Arai's revelations changed the entire focus of the investigation: Arai had had no part in the disappearance of the last four victims, but Shima, his driver, had. From Shima, Arai had learned that Sekine had killed Endo and his driver, Wakui, with poison and that Shima had helped bury them. So what Shima knew was enough to bury Sekine.

The police got tired of waiting and arrested Arai on a fraud charge. They didn't think he'd be of much use, since even if he did confess to killing his wife, proving a ten-year-old murder would be difficult with no body. What they were interested in was what Arai could tell them about Shima. If they could break Shima, Sekine would be easy pickings.

What no one had counted on, especially Sekiguchi, was the Consigliere telling his boss Takada about the existence of the tapes on the day of Arai's arrest. This prompted Takada to call Shima immediately and tell him simply that either Shima disclose the location of Endo's body or Shima's body would be needing burial itself.

Shima was duly shaken, but he was in a real bind. He wanted to tell Takada where Endo's body was, but there was no body—nothing left to call a body anyway. How could Shima tell a yakuza boss that he'd help cut up and burn the body of his number two man?

Takada, for his part, was speeding justice along, or threatening to, because the wheels were turning so damn slowly. He wanted honor,

even in death, for Endo, and he wanted Sekiguchi to have an airtight case to nail the killer.

Takada, speaking to Sekiguchi, promised not to kill Shima. He had bigger fish to fry, as long as Sekine was free and alive. But if he could have time with Shima alone, he'd learn where the body was. Cops were staking out Shima's place; couldn't Sekiguchi make them go away?

Sekiguchi couldn't do that, of course. "We have someone staked out guarding his place most of the time these days. *Most* of the time," he repeated.

Takada took the hint. When the cop left his watch, Takada and a couple of goons showed up. Shima, looking out the window and seeing what was coming down, bolted out the back and fled to the police station. In tears, he got down on his hands and knees and begged, "If you're going to watch my house, for God's sake please do it twenty-four hours a day."

When the police could not promise him that, Shima took off. No one knew where he went. Not Takada, not Sekiguchi, not the Saitama police. The police had Arai in custody, but once again everything was at a standstill.

Yet once again Sekiguchi's unusual yakuza information network came through as the Consigliere handed him several audio tapes. The sound quality was terrible, but you could tell it was Arai talking with Sekine and Shima. A lot of things were said in a kind of code, but for a lot of things the meaning was plenty clear.

Shima—in probable reference to the disappearance of Endo—assures Arai that there is no problem. "The body is invisible," he says. Then he adds, "The body is in Gunma." Shima makes references to other dead bodies. He tells of driving Kawasaki's car to Tokyo station, where he abandoned it in the parking lot; he implies he helped transport Kawasaki's corpse.

There was nothing damning, but there was enough to work with in the interrogation room. Shima was key, but without Shima there would be no questioning, there would be no case. And so began

another wait-and-see period. In November, Sekiguchi left the team and returned to the Anti–Organized Crime Division. The unspoken assumption was that Shima had been killed and that, after all this, the case would never be solved.

I was wrong.

It was the yakuza boss Takada who remained dogged in his personal pursuit of justice. In late November he succeeded in tracking down Shima, who had also changed his name and married; Takada passed the word on to Sekiguchi, who in turn reported it to the Saitama police. They nabbed Shima in December, and, when confronted with the existence of the tapes, Shima sang.

His information proved good. Searching the site in Gunma Prefecture that Shima pointed them to, the police found enough of Kawasaki's teeth to make their case. They had sent a very small crew. No one knew. Not the *Yomiuri*. Not anyone.

On January 5, right after the New Year's holidays, the Saitama police let Shima out on bail and announced the arrest of Gen Sekine and his wife, Hiroko, for the dismemberment of Akio Kawasaki. Within hours of his arrest, Sekine admitted almost everything. After an agonizing year and, depending upon how you look at it, more than a decade, the Saitama Dog Lover Serial Disappearances case was closed.

Did I get the scoop? Did the *Yomiuri* get the scoop?

Noooooo.

I felt betrayed and angry and broke away from the madhouse at the office to call Sekiguchi.

"Jake, why didn't you call?"

"Why didn't I call?"

"You never gave me your home phone number, so I called the Urawa office three times since New Year's and couldn't get hold of you. I thought you were overseas."

“Did you leave a message?”

“Yes, of course.”

I was in shock. Was he lying to me? I felt like a girlfriend who had been cheated on.

I asked around the office if anyone had called for me.

“Oh, yeah, you got a few calls,” one of the newbies volunteered. “I think it was insurance or something. The numbers are here somewhere.” He shuffled through the pile of baby pictures, sports records, and clippings on his desk until he found a piece of paper with a number scribbled on it. It was Sekiguchi’s home phone number.

It was everything I could do to keep from throttling the kid. Caught in my throat was a scream: “You’re the guy! You’re the guy that fucked up a year’s worth of work because you were too damn lazy to call me!” But it stayed in my throat.

I’d screwed up. If I had gone down to Sekiguchi’s place over the holidays, it would have changed everything. I’d made the fatal mistake that Sekiguchi had warned me about, not dropping in when nothing appeared to be going on, not keeping tabs on open cases. And I’d never given him my home phone number. The fact that he’d called the office at all put him at amazing risk.

So that’s the anticlimactic end to the tale. I had a solid lead on the story. I knew the game plan. Up to that last chess move, I knew all about what was going on with the investigation, and I could have known that they’d found the remains of Kawasaki. I could have had the scoop of the year. I didn’t.

In the end, Sekine and his wife were convicted for the murders of only four people. How many they really murdered is still a mystery.

PART 2

日常

The Working Day

Welcome to Kabukicho!

After a brief and relatively boring stint covering local polictics in Saitama, it wasn't long before the police beat came calling again, this time in Tokyo proper. I was finally hitting the big time. And when it was time for all of us new to the Tokyo shakaibu to be assigned to our prospective beats, I was assigned to Hell. The vice squad.

I was married by now, and Mrs. Sunao Adelstein was not excited by my posting to temptation alley. We'd been married for about three years. It had been a whirlwind romance. I'd met her at an event she was covering as a reporter for Nikkei Publications, and I'd managed to ask her on a date. She was twenty-nine and wanted to be married before she was thirty. After several dates, she laid down the terms: we could go out for three months, but if at the end of those three I wasn't serious about marriage—sayonora. She was funny, bilingual, and foxy—still is—and it seemed like an excellent business deal. I stated my terms: marriage—okay! but I demanded a three-year ban on producing offspring. She agreed, and we were engaged in record time. We actually got married the day before her thirtieth birthday, on my lunch break at the Urawa City Hall. It was almost nullified the same day because I had written my birthday down according to the traditional Japanese imperial calendar, Showa 44, rather than the Western calendar, 1969. However, a little yelling and screaming made things work out just fine.

She was excited about moving up to Tokyo, and so was I. Out of New Jersey at last. I was back on the police beat in the big city.

Technically, it was the Fourth District of the Metropolitan Police, but in reality it was like being assigned to a combat zone. The Fourth District contained the Shinjuku police, almost all of Shinjuku

Ward, and the notorious Kabukicho. Kabukicho had nothing to do with kabuki, the traditional theater art performed exclusively by men (including the roles of women), but a lot to do with the traditional sex industry.

Kabukicho used to be the largest and most volatile and profitable red-light district in Tokyo. Under Governor Shintaro Ishihara, the TMPD has made a concerted effort to clean it up, leaving it a shadow of its former self. The impetus probably was the horrific fire at the Mei-sei 56 Building in September 2001, which killed forty-four people. The building was owned by Shigeo Segawa, a yakuza-backed flesh merchant also known as the King of Soapland, whose buildings had been cited time and again for safety violations.

It focused attention on what a lawless area Kabukicho had become.[1*] Something needed to be done. Maybe not a full-scale cleanup but forced compliance with safety regulations would have been enough. Maybe.

I'm not a New Yorker, but I guess you could compare it to the old Times Square versus the new post-Giuliani Times Square.

As far as entertainment districts went, in 1999 nothing beat Kabukicho for pure sleaze. Drugs, prostitution, sexual slavery, rip-off bars, dating clubs, massage parlors, S-and-M parlors, pornography shops and porn producers, high-dollar hostess clubs, low-dollar blow job salons, more than a hundred different yakuza factions, the Chinese mafia, gay prostitute bars, sex clubs, female junior high school students' soiled uniforms/panties resale shops, and a population of workers more ethnically diverse than anywhere else in Japan. It was like a foreign country in the middle of Tokyo. Of course, I didn't have any idea of how seedy the place was at that time. All I knew was that I had been assigned to cover it.

I hadn't been there in years. I wondered if the mysterious tarot machine that had so accurately predicted my future in 1992 was still there. Maybe it was time for an update. I could use some advice. The Fourth District was a heavy burden to carry.

I wasn't left to do it on my own. Inoue assigned Okimura to cover it as well. Okimura was a 1993 entry, like me, and a lot more savvy about those things than I was. He had been in Yokohama, another hotbed of criminal activity, and been tested and tried on the fields of the police beat. He had married a hostess, one of the most beautiful in Yokohama, alienating at least one senior editor at the Yokohama branch who had been courting the woman at the same time. Okimura had been a kickboxer in college, and he still had that lean and fit look. He had the thousand-yard stare that you see in some Special Forces veterans.

The police beat district reporters were under the command of the TMPD reporters, who were stationed at the headquarters of the TMPD. They commanded; we obeyed. We also were at the mercy of the yu-gun (reserve corps) reporters, who could generally pull us off the beat any time they wanted a warm body. Inoue had given orders that this year, we newbies were going to actually be allowed to cover our beat and not be errand boys for the senior reporters in the *Yomiuri* office on the day shift. It would be an interesting experiment.

The Shinjuku police station was a ten-minute walk from Kabukicho, next to the Nishi Shinjuku station, close to an island of office buildings. It was fairly new and towered over the area. It was at least seven stories tall. A police officer with a long pole was always stationed in front of the police station, standing guard. I had to get past the guard to even enter the police station. I told him I was a reporter for the *Yomiuri*. He didn't bat an eye. He looked at my ID and waved me in. I guess they were a little more used to dealing with foreigners in Tokyo, or at least at the Shinjuku police station.

Almost every district in Tokyo has one police station with a press club inside. The Shinjuku police station held the press club for the Fourth District. I took the elevator to one of the upper floors. The club was huge by most standards. It was a giant square room with a

reporter's desk from each newspaper/television outlet lined up against the wall, forming an L from the front to back. Next to the door was a closed-off tatami room, loaded with futons and completely dark unless you went in and turned on the light. A place to sleep. I felt in my bones that I was really going to like this assignment.

The tatami room would definitely come in handy. Sunao and I were trying to have children, and come hell or high water, night or day, we were not missing her ovulation day. In a pinch, this room would do.

The current tenant of the desk I was about to occupy was snoring when I got there, leaning as far as possible on the low-backed desk chair, on the edge of teetering over, his arms dangling limply, his nose pointing at the sky, his messy hair sticking up. He was making gurgling sounds. His shirt was covered in rice cracker flakes; a half-open pack lay discarded at his feet. I'll call him Crumbly.

The young female reporter from the *Asahi* sitting two seats away from him—Ms. Beanpole is how I've always thought of her—was curling up her lips in disgust at him when I walked in. She gave me a funny look, made eye contact, but didn't say anything. I dropped my backpack filled with books, my camera, and my computer on top of Crumbly's desk, casually. It made a loud thud when it hit. It startled Crumbly, who slid off his chair and landed near my foot.

"Sorry." I didn't know what else to say.

Crumbly stood up, grabbing the rest of the rice crackers as he came to his feet.

"No problem. Just catching up on some sleep. So."

"So."

"So you're taking over, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't have much information or wisdom to pass on to you. It's not like I've been doing the Fourth District for long, and

frankly, the district reporters are kept so busy doing odds and ends, we are barely here at all."

"Inoue-san said the same thing. He said this year he's going to encourage the district reporters to really cover their beats. It'll be good prep work for being a police reporter at headquarters."

He pulled a red notebook out of a pile of notebooks on the desk and said, "Yeah, well, I wish that it had been that way with me. Here's the list of officers' addresses I have. It's not much."

It wasn't. The list hadn't been updated in more than a year. If that was all he had, I would basically have to start from scratch, compiling my own list of police officers and where they lived to make the evening rounds. He handed me a collection of Fourth District police station announcements, newspaper clippings, a guidebook to Kabukicho, a plastic bag full of meishi. I noticed that there was a pile of discount tickets to sex shops in the trash basket next to the desk and an empty box of condoms, but I couldn't say if they were his and I didn't want to ask.

I asked Crumbly what I should do to cover the area effectively.

He bit off half a rice cracker and offered me the other half. I took it.

While he chewed, crumbs blew through the air. Some of them caught in the breeze from the fan, then wafted to and hovered over Ms. Beanpole, who swatted at them like flies. Crumbly gave me his take on what it meant to be a district police reporter.

"Basically, Adelstein, you're cannon fodder. The district police reporters are errand boys for the TMPD police reporters and the guys in the head office. All the big cases are done under the direction of TMPD headquarters, and anything that the local police do on their own is probably not newsworthy. You're lucky if it even gets into the local edition, let alone the national edition. Nobody expects you to get a big scoop on this beat, and nobody gets too pissed off when you get your ass handed to you on a silver platter. Get to know a few cops, write a couple human interest stories, feed

some intel to the real police reporters, and you'll have done all right."

"I thought Kabukicho was a hotbed of criminal activity."

"It is. But that doesn't make it newsworthy. People get killed or injured here all the time. But who cares if some Chink, yakuza thug, or whore gets whacked? The cops don't, and the public doesn't either. Nine times out of ten, no matter how much it looks like a murder, the Shinjuku police will write it up as a case of assault resulting in death—or manslaughter. Why? So they don't have to launch a full-fledged investigation. They could find a Chinese skimmer[2*] stabbed thirty-six times in the back on the streets of Kabukicho, and they'd call it an accidental death. Probably they wouldn't announce it either."

"So what is newsworthy here?"

"Anything involving someone famous or a civilian or a teenager. That's about it. If yakuza start whacking each other and it looks like a gang war—maybe newsworthy."

"I thought I was supposed to get to know the names and addresses and phone numbers of every major detective in the police station."

"Ahhh, they tell you that, but it can't be done. It's not like the old days. In the old days, you'd go to the vice police chief and he'd give you a list with the names and addresses of the head of each investigative division and the squad leader names as well. They won't do that anymore. Especially not the Mole."

"The Mole?"

"That's the vice police chief here. He's always squinting like he can't stand being in the light. Spent his whole career in administration. He believes his job is to keep you from getting any information, including press releases. He'll do everything possible to interfere with whatever story you want to work on. Totally worthless and hates reporters. Good luck."

Ms. Beanpole snickered at that. I turned to her.

"Is that true?"

“Absolutely. Maybe he’ll be different with a foreigner. Who knows?”

He wasn’t. I asked The Mole when I could see the chief of police and make my formal greetings. Refused. I asked when I could speak with detectives from each section and was told, “Never.” The Mole’s answer to everything was always the same.

“I handle public relations. Anything you want to know, you ask me. Besides, the TMPD headquarters handles all the big stuff. Don’t bother the detectives.”

Fortunately for me, the chief of police had heard about me from Misawa, the most senior and most venerated police reporter at the *Yomiuri*, and while The Mole was busy brushing me off, the chief emerged from his office and invited me in. I ended up asking if it was all right to at least greet the head of each section, and the chief told The Mole to set it up. I could see The Mole cringe when he was given the order, but he did what he was told.

It wasn’t my charming personality alone that got the chief on my side.

I’d come prepared, of course. I knew the chief was a heavy smoker and I knew he liked Lucky Strikes, so I’d had a friend stock up at the duty free for me. They were packed in the hard-shell case rather than the soft pack, which was rare at the time, I was told. A carton of cigarettes could buy a lot of goodwill in Japan.

After exchanging business cards with about ten police officers under the watchful eye of The Mole, I headed back to the press club.

Beanpole was waiting. She introduced me to the reporters from Jiji, Kyodo, NHK, the *Mainichi*, and Nikkei. We made chitchat. I got the usual twenty questions. I was a good sport. I explained how I’d gotten into the *Yomiuri*. Yes, I could eat sushi. Yes, I liked the cops. Yes, I could read and write Japanese.

I complained about The Mole. We all disliked him. In that sense, he did a lot to unify the club. There was nothing exciting on the

news and no announcement scheduled for the day, so the first thing I did after lunch was pull out a futon, turn out the lights in the tatami room, and sleep. The Fourth District is Hell? Hah. It was the sixth realm, the Western Paradise—or so I thought as I was nodding off.

Paradise didn't last long. At two in the afternoon, The Mole called from downstairs to let us know that the Shinjuku police would be announcing an arrest for violations of the Prostitution Prevention Law. The vice squad head, Shimozawa-san, would be giving us a lecture downstairs in the chief's office. I called the TMPD club to let them know. We all hustled down to the room, and there was the chief behind his desk and the lead detective on the case standing in front of the desk with handouts. Another detective was sitting in the corner, taking notes. The press handouts didn't have a lot written on them. It was always that way with the TMPD. The Saitama police press releases were like novels compared to the skimpy materials TMPD handed out.

Two days before, the Shinjuku police had arrested the owner and manager of a club in Kabukicho known as The Mature Hot Wives Party Palace for managing prostitutes. He had been running the establishment for more than a year and raked in close to $400,000. Shimozawa showed us all an advertisement for the club taken from *Tokyo Sports*, a popular newspaper sold at every train station in the city:

> Hot, mature women starved for love want you to satisfy their needs. There's nothing better than fooling around with another man's wife, especially one in her prime. Call now.

The ads showed several women in their late thirties, most of them with black bars across their eyes, partially obscuring their faces. Akimoto also had been advertising on the Internet and on mobile telephone Web sites. That was a big deal at the time: people using the Internet for criminal activities!

Another thing about the Web page that was ahead of its time was that if you printed out the home page and brought it with you, you got a discount of several thousand yen. The Web site was very professionally done. It had a full menu of services and options listed, but I couldn't figure out what they meant. *Wakamesake? Shakuhachi?*

Why would they offer sake with seaweed? And shakuhachi? Were they using wind instruments as dildos? Was I not getting something?

Shimozawa laid it all out for us but didn't explain the menu.

"Unlike many sex clubs in Kabukicho, this place was openly providing *honban*. They had a staff of more than thirty women on call and ten on site at any given time. We suspect an organized crime presence in the background. Any questions?"

No one raised his or her hand. I did.

"What's honban?" I asked.

Shimozawa looked surprised.

"You don't know what honban is?"

"No."

Beanpole giggled.

"That's actual sexual intercourse. Insertion of the penis into the vagina," he answered succinctly.

"Isn't that what all the sex clubs are doing?"

"Not quite."

"Well, if the customers aren't inserting the penis in the vagina, what are they doing with their penises, anyway?"

Shimozawa laughed. "Have you ever covered the Crime Prevention Bureau before?"

"Not really."

"So you don't know how this works?"

"What works?"

"The whole sex industry."

“Not really.”

“Well, you’d better read up.”

Nagoya-kun from Kyodo asked if there had been anyone famous there when they’d made the arrests and raided the club. There hadn’t been.

I had another question: “How many of the prostitutes were arrested?”

“None.”

“And the customers?”

“None.”

“Just the manager?”

“Just the manager.”

People were looking at me as if I were a total idiot. But it didn’t make any sense to me. Why did the cops bust only the manager of the club if there was an antiprostitution law on the books? I realized that I was in completely new territory now. I wanted to ask more, but I felt I was trying the patience of the cops, so I shut up, but there are limits. One of my favorite Japanese sayings goes along the lines: “To not know and to ask a question is a moment of embarrassment; to not know and not ask is a lifetime of shame.” I always thought it was better to look like an idiot and ask a lot of questions about new materials rather than fake it.

I asked another question: “This club marketed itself as being staffed by all married women, but how many of them were actually married?”

Shimozawa didn’t even need to look at his notes. “Good question. Only about a third of them were actually married to someone. Most of them were divorced or single.”

After the lecture, as I was packing up my computer, the detective sitting in the corner came up to me and introduced himself. I was later told that people referred to him as Alien Cop. He was a striking figure. About six feet two—tall for a Japanese guy—very thin, shaved head, and his eyes were jet black, almost all pupil and no

white. He was dressed in a dark gray suit, navy blue tie, and a pair of black loafers.

"You don't get this stuff, do you? Ever done the police beat before?"

"I covered the Organized Crime Control Bureau in Saitama."

"OC stuff, huh? This is a different ball game."

"I can see. I should study up."

"Tokyo vice is a complicated thing. Books won't tell you how it works. You can study the laws, of course, but what's on the books and what's enforced—different things."

He gave me the card of a bar in Kabukicho.

"I get out of here at nine. Meet me at this bar. I'll walk you through Kabukicho, explain the deal to you."

I was grateful. It's not often that a cop decides to take you under his wing. I agreed to meet him, quite happily.

First, I had to finish up an article I was working on about a "hot wives" club. I typed it up in about an hour and sent it to my editor. Then I walked fifteen minutes to Kinokuniya bookstore, picked up a copy of the Japan Criminal Code and related laws, and started thumbing through the adult entertainment laws. It was not easy to understand. Alien Cop knew what he was talking about.

The bar where I was supposed to meet Alien Cop was a dive. Tiny. It was more like a walk-in closet. There was a standing bar counter with an obsidian top that ran across the room. There were no windows and no tables to sit down at. It was so dark that when I lit my cigarette it seemed as if I were setting off fireworks. The master of the place was dressed in a tuxedo, and his head was completely shaved. I tried to order a drink, but he said, "You'll have a whiskey" and poured me one.

Rule number one of drinking with cops: you are permitted to order only (1) sake, (2) *shōchū*, (3) beer, or (4) whiskey. Tiki-tiki

drinks are not allowed. A dry martini may be acceptable since 007 drank them. Order a Blue Hawaii, and you might as well pack your bags and start covering family affairs.

Alien Cop sauntered in thirty minutes late. He wore blue jeans, red sneakers, and an AC/DC shirt. I felt overdressed. He nodded at the master, who nodded back, poured him a shot of Jameson's, and slid it down the bar to him with the precision of the Scottish curling team at the Olympics. Alien lifted the glass to his mouth in one motion as it slid into his fingers and knocked it down.

"So what do I call you? Adelstein-san? Jake-san?"

"Just Jake will be fine."

"Okay, Jake-san. So this stuff is a little confusing for you?"

"Well, yeah. If prostitution is illegal, shouldn't everything in this area be closed down?"

"Depends on your definition of prostitution. Let's go for a walk. I'm off duty, and this is off the record."

And so we sauntered out into the night.

We started our walk in Kabukicho near Tokyo Topless, a legendary strip club. Alien pointed out various types of shops as we passed them and began to expound on the life of a vice cop.

Kabukicho in the evening in 1999 looked like the Disneyland Festival of Lights Parade, except that the neon signs were advertising blow jobs instead of family vacations. In front of the buildings and in the middle of the streets, touts dressed in formal black suits and white shirts aggressively sought out customers, grabbing sleeves and shoving pamphlets into the hands of meandering salarymen. From some of the buildings, loudspeakers vomited out the husky voices of women advertising sexual pleasures beyond imagining: $200 for forty minutes. A few shops displayed seminude pictures of the women working the club on the lit-up billboards in the shop entrances. Every building seemed to be

crammed with shops and bars and covered in signs advertising them.

“I don’t understand why the prostitutes weren’t arrested on this last case. Did they make a deal or something?”

“You have to understand that the Prostitution Prevention Law here is really about protecting the prostitutes. You could call it the Prostitute Protection Law.”

“How does that work?”

As we were walking past Bareo, he pointed out a Thai prostitute lurking near an alley, hoping to drum up customers.

“I could arrest her if she’s openly soliciting. That’s illegal. However, if the guys come up to her, that’s not a problem. Anyway, here’s the deal. After the war, there were lots of people basically selling their own daughters into the sex trade. Kind of like slaves.”

I nodded.

“Well, in 1958, prostitution as it used to be was banished. It used to be a licensed industry. The idea was to make sure that women couldn’t be forced into sexual servitude. So basically, the people the law punishes are the pimps, the brothel owners, and the guys who solicit for the prostitutes. The idea at the time was that many of the women in the industry were being coerced into it and if you punished them, it would be punishing the victim. Plus, no one would come forward to the cops. For the john and the hooker, there’s no punishment. If the woman is under twenty, we might put her in a shelter.”

“Why doesn’t the law punish the customers? Wouldn’t that discourage the trade?”

“Sure it would, but who the fuck do you think wrote the laws? Guys. Hell, in the 1950s probably half the Diet was frequenting Soapland.[3*] It was a huge social problem, with girls being sold like cattle, and something had to be done, but that didn’t mean the guys were going to put their own dicks in the sling. So that’s how it stands.”

“So there’s no punishment for being a prostitute or sleeping with one. What about all the other stuff that goes on here? That’s got to be illegal, right?”

“Nope. The general rule is that as long as it’s not straight intercourse, a store or shop can offer any kind of sexual service you could want. Just as long as it’s not vaginal penetration with a penis. There are zoning issues and stuff, of course.”

“That’s why they can advertise, right?”

“Absolutely. In the newspapers, on billboards, on packets of tissues. Check out this storefront.”

We were in front of a shop called, more or less, Dick Nurse.

The billboard displayed pantyless Japanese women in white nurse uniforms complete with little white hats, squatting over an anonymous Japanese man, their hands on his crotch. The ad was not subtle:

> 30 minutes, 6,000 yen. Our nurses will nurse your lower body back to health. These trained nurses will examine and explore every nook and cranny of your body and take your temperature, oral or anal, whichever you prefer. Options available.

“And this is legal, right?”

“Yes. As long as the girls aren’t fucking the customers—not a problem. Look, you can see we’ve even approved them to do business under the adult entertainment laws.”

He pointed at the seal on the door.

I was looking at the options menu, but there were a lot of terms I didn’t understand.

“What’s this mean?”

“Anaru name? That’s anilingus. She licks your ass if you pay extra. You also can get a prostate massage. That’s when the girl sticks a finger up your ass while she blows you. Standard stuff.”

We kept walking. Alien broke down all the shops and businesses for me by types and services.

There were sexual massage parlors and fashion health shops. Those usually offered hand jobs, blow jobs, and anal massage or anilingus. Some were now offering anal sex. The so-called image clubs were like sexual theme parks. You could choose from several motifs: virgin brides, schoolgirls, nurses, nuns, and animated characters. Most of the girls in those places wore some kind of costume and did some mild role playing, much like the girls at the Maid Station.

He took me by Shinjuku Joshi Gakuen (Shinjuku School for Girls). This was the most famous spot in Kabukicho for getting serviced by women dressed as schoolgirls. Many schools in Japan require students, male and female, to wear uniforms, and apparently this seems to create some kind of Pavlovian association of school uniforms with the first feelings of lust. At 10 P.M., there was actually a line in front of the place.

“Have you ever been inside?” I asked Alien.

“No, not for business or pleasure. It’s a popular place, though. There’s a huge selection of uniforms, a copy of practically every uniform from every high school in Tokyo. It gets some guys pretty hot.”

Of course, at every one of these places, as soon as they saw my face, they immediately told Alien, “No foreigners allowed.”

That was one reason I don’t think I ever really got to explore Kabukicho as well as my coworkers did, which was probably just as well.

Alien did manage to get me into a couple of lingerie pubs, a cabaret, and some other seedy places where I normally wouldn’t have had access. Of course, I footed the bill.

Some pubs offered blow jobs to the clients. There were still one or two pink salons, where, for 3,000 yen (about $30), you would go in and order a cup of coffee, and while you were drinking it, one of the female staff would unbutton your pants, wash your penis with a warm towel, and then fellate you. I have to take his word for it because foreigners were banned from entry, of course.

There were strip clubs where audience participation was allowed. Alien dragged me into one of the smaller ones; it might have been Art Shower—the name escapes me. The club was like a giant living room with a large round platform in the middle surrounded by tables with yellow tablecloths on them and chairs that looked as if they were covered in red velvet. The dancer was gyrating to Japanese pop. She stripped off everything, and then she masturbated onstage, making high-pitched squealing noises while spreading her legs in the butterfly pose. She was supposed to be versed in the arts of the "flower train." That is to say, she was supposed to be able to hold a pen in her vagina and write things or shoot blow darts. We weren't in luck that night because there was no such spectacular performance.

The club smelled of piss, ammonia, sweat, cigarettes, musk, and body fluids. The smell of woman was pungent and powerful. At the end of the performance some of the customers were invited to masturbate the dancer onstage with a vibrator at the conclusion *(irepon)*. We didn't stay long. Alien didn't seem particularly interested in any of it. He was very much into his role as a tour guide. He ran through the entire hidden language of strip clubs for me, elaborating on the difference between "pachinko" and "open." Some of the strip clubs had separate rooms where you could go with a dancer and she would do what it took to make you ejaculate for an extra fee. The strip clubs employing foreigners were often said to offer actual intercourse as part of the package.

We next walked past the host clubs. He showed me the giant amusement center/office building Furinkaikan, which was where all the local yakuza congregated during the day and night. There was a giant open-space coffee shop on the ground floor. There were more than a hundred different yakuza groups with offices and business in Kabukicho, and Furinkaikan was their Grand Central Station and their convention hall.

We walked past the love hotels and the Thai prostitutes standing near the park close to Okubo station. Iranian males were servicing gay Japanese men in the restroom of another park in the area. There

were several bars staffed by transsexuals and even a few bars offering drag queen performances.

On a narrow road to Koma Stadium, a pencil-thin building with a sign advertising THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT CLINIC caught my eye. Alien said it was another variation of the nurse-themed image club. However, it had a real ob-gyn examining table with stirrups, making it all the more “authentic.”

The most memorable sex club of the evening was Bareo. It had an actual subway car inside, and when you paid your cash and got onto the train, one of the girls, pretending to be another passenger, would board the train and molest you, whisper in your ear, stick her hands down your pants, and perform other lewd acts. For an extra fee, you could take one of the girls out on a date and she would molest you on an actual train. This was the hot sex club at the time. There were already one or two clubs where men could pay for the privilege of pretending to molest a woman on a subway train, but the role reversal was what made this club such a hit.

Amaenbo was close to City Hall and supposedly popular with midlevel bureaucrats. They had a glass toilet that would let you see your hostess perform any of the standard bodily functions. You could stick your head in the bottom and be pissed on if that was your thing.

I didn’t find any of this as disgusting as I thought I would. However, I passed on a chance to see the magic toilet in action.

We dropped in at one S-and-M club. Alien knew the owner, a short little bald guy with a ponytail who wore a sarong, and chatted him up. The owner let me peek at the show behind the curtain. In the center of a huge room filled with eight or nine tables, there was a small platform, and on it was a dominatrix clad entirely in leather. Her breasts jutted out of her leather blouse, and the nipples were pierced with what looked like safety pins. Her hair was pulled back in a bun. The only thing not leather on her was a huge white strap-on dildo, which she was using to sodomize a middle-aged man in a navy blue suit.

I didn’t need to see more. We went back to the street.

By one in the morning there were several Chinese prostitutes walking the streets openly. They didn’t seem to care whether I was Japanese or not. I had to peel one off every five minutes.

Around two in the morning, Alien took me to a no-panty *shabu-shabu* restaurant where half-nude young women prepared beef dishes at your table and flirted with you while you ate. I picked up the tab for that, too.

“So, I get the picture. Well, what is illegal besides actual normal sexual intercourse?”

“Not much. Hard-core pornography. Uncensored stuff.”

“You mean it’s illegal to sell pornography showing someone getting fellated or something but not illegal to get the actual blow job?”

“Yeah, that sums it up. You catch on fast. You can do it, but you can’t watch it. At least not on your VCR.”

“So what’s to enforce?”

“Mmmmmm.”

It was hard to understand Alien because the twenty-four-year-old girl serving him his dinner was playfully stuffing her nipples into his mouth. He tongued them while talking. Her moaning, fake or real, made it hard to follow the conversation.

“Well, every now and then you have to take down the places that are blatantly offering intercourse. You have to draw a line somewhere.”

“Why don’t they just make normal sex legal? I mean, you can do almost everything else.”

“Actually, the restriction on normal intercourse makes it more interesting, I think. It forces people to search for new avenues of erotic pleasure. There’re a lot of ways to get your rocks off besides the standard screw.” He popped the woman’s nipple out of his mouth and had a drink.

After dinner I was ready to catch a taxi home, but Alien wanted to take me to one more place. It was a Korean massage parlor and sauna.

Alien assured me it was a legitimate place. “Hey, I’m not going to get either of us in trouble. I come to this place now and then. Koh-san will take care of you. This is my treat.”

The setup reminded me of a place in Omiya. I was led into a small, windowless room. There was a massage table in the center and a shelf next to the wall, stocked with various lotions, a basket for clothes, a couple of vibrators, a bottle of rubbing alcohol, cotton sheets, and towels.

Koh-san was wearing a beige nurse’s outfit and round wire-rimmed glasses. She had on long white latex gloves. Her Japanese was fairly good, and she had me strip and lie down. She gave me a twenty-minute massage, using a very sticky clear massage oil. It was like being rubbed with hot glue. I was facedown, and then she had me turn over. I didn’t want to turn over, but she laughed and literally flipped me in a second. She commented on my anatomy. She giggled. She told me to wait, and she called in two of her friends to look. She and her friends made comments to one another in Korean or Chinese and giggled some more. Then they left. I caught the word *katsurei*, meaning “circumcised.”

The rest of the massage was not relaxing but not unpleasant. The massage was for forty minutes, so after a total of thirty minutes had passed, I started to get up but she would have none of it. “Massage not over. Please wait. Relax.” And with that she grabbed my shaft in one hand and speared my anus with her other.

Maybe Alien Cop was testing my sense of humor? My curiosity? I was wondering if refusing the service would be insulting his hospitality. I didn’t have to wonder for long. After finishing me off, Koh put me into the shower. Then I got dressed and walked out to the lobby, where I met up with Alien.

He was glowing. He had something approaching a smile. I thanked him for setting me up with such a good masseuse. What

else was I supposed to do?

“No problem. Now you understand what Kabukicho is all about. Sexual desire. Selling it and satisfying it. As long as the shops don’t go too far over the line, they can do whatever they want. Our job as vice cops isn’t to put these places out of business, it’s to keep them in line.”

I nodded in understanding. Alien had a question for me.

“You like Japanese women?”

“I don’t have an Asian fetish, but yeah, I like Japanese women. I married a Japanese woman.”

“I’m the same way as you.”

“You like Japanese women?”

“No, I like foreign women. Blondes and redheads. Can you introduce me to one? I don’t meet many foreigners—well, not the kind, you know, you could date or anything.”

So that was what this was all about. I said I’d see what I could do. And I did. It was the start of a long-term partnership, of sorts. Alien Cop was the guy who gave me my first and maybe only real scoop on the Fourth District.

As I was getting into a taxi, my cell phone rang. It was the editor.

“Adelstein!”

“Yes?”

While I’d been hanging out with Alien Cop, I hadn’t checked my phone or my beeper once. It was now way past the time when any additions or corrections to an article could be made. I thought I was in deep shit.

“What’s with that article you sent about the hot wives club thing?”

“What about it?”

“You wrote in the last line, ‘In reality, only a third of the women were actually married.’ Why the fuck did you put that in?”

“It seemed relevant. False advertising. I mean, all the customers thought they were screwing someone else’s wife, but that wasn’t the case. It just seemed like an important detail to show how shady the operation was.”

“Are you out of your fucking mind? This is the *Yomiuri*, not *Tokyo Sports*. We aren’t about protecting the consumer rights of goddamn perverts. That fucking line stayed all the way to the last edition. Think before you write, idiot.”

And he hung up.

Well, at least the article had made the paper. I was happy about that. I got home at five in the morning, and Sunao was waiting for me. She was still up, in her bathrobe, typing an article on the latest trends in Japanese socks. She had a bath waiting for me and some fried rice on the table ready to be heated up.

She asked me how my day had been, and I told her. I didn’t hold anything back. I felt Jewish puritanical guilt, a need to confess. I thought she’d rake me over the coals, but she was neither shocked nor angry. She listened with some interest while I explained to her everything I’d learned and the whole evening’s events. Even the massage parlor. She did have questions, though. She massaged my shoulders while she interrogated me, occasionally really jamming her thumb in.

“So she just gave you a hand job? She didn’t suck you off or anything?”

“No. Just a hand job.”

“Well, if this cop invited you to come along, I guess that’s what you had to do. Just don’t make a habit it of it. And if you do, I don’t want to hear about it.”

“Understood.”

“And if you do something, wear a condom, honey. I don’t want any diseases.”

“Of course.”

“Do you have any left?”

“Any what left?”

“Any sperm. It’s that time of the month. Check your reporter pad, Jakey.”

I opened my *Yomiuri*-issued calendar/notepad, and sure enough there was a big *O* in Sunao’s handwriting marked in red on the date. The big O. Ovulation day. I guess crawling into bed was not an option.

I winced a little. Sunao just smiled.

“Don’t worry, Jake. I won’t even charge you today. It’s on the house.”

It was a long day.

Well, at least I knew that this “hot wife” was really married. I was definitely not getting ripped off. I thought to myself, it’s good to have my own hot wife rather than be paying another man’s wife. Maybe it would keep me out of trouble.

Note: Soapland Trivia

The Soapland shops in Japan used to be called *toruko*, short for Turkish baths. This so offended one Turkish resident of Japan that he launched a campaign to get the name changed, which the *Yomiuri* reported on in the late sixties or seventies. I remember one particularly obnoxious editor from the Foreign Affairs Bureau showing me his article about it. Eventually, Japan gave in to international pressure and solved the problem by giving the sex shops a wholesome moniker. It sounds like good, clean fun. “Soapland.”

Incidentally, the Japanese term for blow-up sex dolls is “Dutch wife.” The Embassy of the Netherlands has yet to launch a formal protest or make counterassertions that “Dutch women are not frigid and thus we are outraged by the term ‘Dutch wife’ in the selling and use of inanimate sex dolls,” but when it does it’s my scoop.

1* It was a difficult story to cover because the victims were in sex clubs and illegal gambling parlors at the time of their demise. The names were not printed after the early-evening edition for that reason.

2* A skimmer scans credit cards for their data and then makes illegal purchases with fake cards or sells the information to third parties.

3* Soapland was a blind spot in the Japanese Adult Entertainment Law. In those places, the customer was bathed and blown by the girl, and then, if the two of them hit it off, they could go to another room next door and have actual intercourse. The intercourse wasn't included in the price of admission and wasn't guaranteed, so technically it wasn't prostitution. It didn't make much sense to me, but that's how Alien explained it. It wasn't sex; it was "free love."

My Night as a Host(ess)

You can look at Kabukicho as an example of the sociopathology of Japanese life, or you can look at it as a microcosm of relationships in general. Host and hostess clubs are probably the most misunderstood aspects of Japan's adult entertainment industry. They're not about sex, they're about the illusion of intimacy and the titillating possibility of sex.

Intimacy is a commodity in Japan, and it rarely comes for free. It's the same way in the United States. We just pay different people.

In the United States, we pay psychiatrists, therapists, counselors, and life coaches to listen to our problems, raise our self-esteem, pretend to like us, and give us good advice. Friends used to do those things for free, but friends have been known to retreat when the water gets too deep. Japanese tend to believe that going to a shrink is a sign of weakness and an admission of mental illness, so there's still a tendency to avoid those types of paid friendships.

After covering the Kabukicho beat, I learned that when a Japanese man wants his ego—as opposed to his penis—stroked, when he wants to be fussed over or have someone listen to his problems, he doesn't go home to his wife, he goes to a hostess club. A hostess club is not a sex club. A hostess club is not a pickup joint, a *fuzokuten*, or a singles bar. It is usually a small bar with several attractive women who will greet you warmly, sit down and chat with you on a sofa, sing karaoke with you, and act as if they were your lover or flirt with you as though they might want to be.

Typically, the woman running a hostess bar, the mama-san, is a former hostess with a scratchy, rough voice from years of inhaling secondhand smoke, drinking watered-down whiskey, and staying up too late. If you want to know the number of years any particular

woman has been working in the industry, just listen to the timbre of her voice. If she sounds like Scatman Crothers, she's a veteran.

It's not unheard of for a hostess to date a customer, just rare. The problem with turning a customer into a boyfriend, for the hostess, is a loss of revenue, not to mention the potential of alienating other regular customers. The hostess has to maintain an illusion of availability to encourage a pseudocourtship that might someday culminate in sex. Along the way to that elusive goal line, which few regular customers ever reach, a man might blow $10,000 in a year courting a hostess, buying her drinks, giving her birthday presents, and occasionally taking her out to dinner.

On a nippy day in October 1999, I was hanging around the Kabukicho koban shooting the breeze with one of the officers. He said something about the vice squad raiding a "host club" that night. At first I didn't get it. Host club?

"You mean a hostess club?"

"No. It's like a hostess club but with guys doing the hosting."

"You mean a gay joint?"

"No, women go to those clubs, and hosts wait on them just like a hostess would wait on guys. You know, compliment them, pour them drinks, flirt, get them to talk—get them to shell out cash. Look around; what do you think those faggy guys in expensive suits and long red hair are doing in Kabukicho at three in the morning?"

I'd always thought they were trying to pick up chicks, not herd them into a bar that serviced them. Well, compulsive observer of social phenomena that I am, I wanted part of it.

At TMPD at the end of the day, I grabbed Nojima, one of the senior vice squad guys, and suggested a beer. I didn't have to work hard to convince him. But when, in the middle of the first round of drinks, I mentioned the raid that night, he was pissed. He didn't want the story out before its time.

“We’ve got two more places to hit. If you sit on the story for a day, I’ll give you an exclusive.”

“Okay,” I said, being ever so cooperative, “but I want the details now.”

He wasn’t willing to tell me at first, but after a bit, here is the story he gave me:

The Shinjuku police and the TMPD Juvenile Protection Department had decided that host clubs were a breeding ground for juvenile delinquency. They had already raided four clubs for violations of the adult entertainment and sex industry laws: operating without a license and allowing juveniles into adult facilities.

“It used to be that the only women who went to host bars were hostesses, but times have changed. What we keep seeing is college girls, sometimes even high school girls with money, who start going to these host clubs. They love the personal attention, and maybe they get infatuated with the hosts, who milk them for everything they have. The girls accumulate debts, and at some point the management introduces them to a job in the sex industry so that they can pay off their debts. Sometimes the guys running the host bars are the same guys who run the sex clubs. Some girls start shoplifting and reselling merchandise to pay off their host bar tabs. We’ve seen enough to know that these aren’t isolated incidents.”

In July of that year, the Shinjuku police had gotten a call from the parents of a high school dropout. Their daughter had received a bill from a host club in Kabukicho for 4 million yen (close to $38,000 then). The parents had freaked out.

The police checked out the host club and found it was operating without a license; they arrested the young owner in August. In September, they launched a broader investigation and were surprised to find seventy-one host clubs in operation. Three years earlier there had been twenty. Why the large increase? According to Nojima, in this day and age, girls just wanted to have fun, hosts just wanted to make money, and with sexual liberation and economic

empowerment women had no problem buying affection just as men did.

It was a little strange to hear sociological theory coming out of the mouth of a cop, but then again, Nojima wasn't your ordinary cop. He was a graduate of Sophia, and he had majored in psychology and was a certified counselor. But he was quick to underscore the economic motive: a good host club pocketed the equivalent of more than $300,000 a year. Nojima, playing sociologist again, suggested I write an article on host clubs, which people knew little about. He named three establishments, and I visited each of them. After being met with the usual confusion about a gaijin writing for the *Yomiuri*, I was pleasantly surprised to find the proprietors willing to talk to me. One even invited me to spend a night as a host. I took him up on the offer, of course.

But before that, I gathered my notes and spoke to my editor about the raids, a breaking story. Kasama, one of the few women in the shakaibu, helped me put the article together and convinced the desk to run it in the national edition. Hamaya, one of the other women in the division, gave me a few words of faint praise for my efforts and some good suggestions. It was a good feeling.

The article was published in the *Yomiuri* morning edition on October 6, ahead of the official announcement that afternoon. It was a nice little scoop.

A few evenings later, I picked out my best suit, trimmed the hair in my ears and my nose, and splashed on some cologne. My shirt was pressed, my tie was straight, my nails were trimmed, and I didn't have any seaweed stuck between my teeth, so I felt fairly debonair. I didn't look anything like a seedy private detective or a struggling English teacher—or, for that matter, like a hungry newspaper reporter. I looked like a host.

Ai was located in the back alleys of Kabukicho, near a stand-up shot bar not far from the Furinkaikan.

The storefront was garish, with neon tubing, spotlit photos of the top-selling hosts, and a gold leaf LADIES' CLUB sign above the entrance. Two bronzelike statues of muscular men guarded the front door, on which the ideograph for *ai*, which means "love," was written in red. It was a combination of expensive Art Deco and 1950s diner kitsch.

Once you go down the steps, you enter the club, which is illuminated by crystal chandeliers but is otherwise dark. Lights ripple over the dance floor as if over a pond. Plush round couches are dotted throughout the room. The effect is rather like a planetarium, as the lights are reflected from bronze statues, silver mirrors, and shiny decor, like stars on a summer night. Perhaps this is an overly poetic description of the place, but that's the idea of it.

When I arrived for duty at six, incredibly early for a host club, Takeshi Aida, the owner and president of the chain of Ai clubs, was waiting for me. He had a punch perm—tight curls all over his head—a thin Mexican moustache, and photochromatic oval shades. He wore an expensive suit, with a fine sheen to it, and a patterned silk tie, knotted so tightly one feared insufficient oxygen was getting to his round baby face. At fifty-nine years of age, he had an undeniable, if hard-to-put-your-finger-on, charm. He was very good at making you feel comfortable.

Aida was born in Niigata Prefecture, the sixth of nine brothers. When he was twenty, he left Niigata for the big city. He went to work for a bed company, where he became a top salesman; started a crime prevention goods business, which went bankrupt; then opened up a wig business, which introduced him to the women-oriented economy.

That led to a job as a host. A year later he was hired away by another host club and then hired away again a couple years later by the largest host club in the city. Obviously Aida had something going for him. Recognizing his calling, he started Ai, which soon

established itself as the gold standard of host clubs. In the years after that, Aida created a small empire of host clubs, pubs, and bars. Ai was such a fixture of Kabukicho nightlife that at some point it was included on a bus tour for middle-aged women from the countryside. When Aida hired me for a night, he had about three hundred men in five clubs in his employ. He had also written a book on business management (and his wife had written a book about the joys and perils of being married to a professional host).

Aida was more than willing to talk about the host club business.

"Host clubs used to be places where women came to dance with attractive young men. Now many women come here because they're lonely. They can't meet a nice guy at work. They want someone who will talk to them, listen to them. They want a shoulder to cry on, someone to sympathize with them. They want the human touch. Some will even ask for advice about how to handle their boorish boyfriends. But some just want a guy to dance with—they like ballroom dancing. Women like hosts who can make them laugh, who can say witty things about what's going on or talk about the latest television shows. The most popular hosts are not necessarily the best-looking guys. A good host is a good listener, entertainer, and counselor and knows when to pour a lady's drink."

Now, the fact that in these clubs men pour drinks for women is noteworthy. In Japanese society, when socially boozing, you never pour your own drinks. Inferiors or younger people are expected to pour drinks for their superiors and elders. The unspoken rule is when women are present, they are always expected to serve the men. So if you are a Japanese woman, having men serve you and look after your needs is a thrill.

"But part of being a good host is knowing how much your client can afford to spend. You can't bankrupt the customer. You can't push her into financial difficulties. That would create a lot of trouble—for everybody. The new host clubs, they use young, cute guys to lure the customers into the clubs. They set the bar low, promising the customer drinks for as cheap as five thousand yen [about $50]. They let anyone into the clubs, even women who are

drunk. Easy marks. The women end up owing. That's when loan sharks come in. The really bad clubs are basically a front for organized crime.

"Ai has been in business a long time. We keep accurate accounts, we pay our taxes, and we are registered with the police so the yakuza can't extort anything out of us. The new host clubs, even if they don't start out as scams, because they are unlicensed, they are vulnerable. They're easily blackmailed and can quickly be turned into moneymakers for the yakuza. The host clubs run by the yakuza, they're not host clubs at all; they're pimp clubs. Their goal is to make customers into hookers or debt slaves.

"Why are host clubs so popular? Because of the men—handsome, charming men who know what women want. They're the reason. Some of the women fancy themselves rich playboys—playgirls, I guess. They want to sleep with the host, and they'll pay to keep that fantasy alive. They're no different from the men who go to hostess clubs and drop a load of cash; they have a dream that they're going to have sex with this object of everybody's desires.

"But for most women, we offer them the perfect date. They can spend an evening being fussed over by a good-looking guy without any of the hassle of a relationship. The host is available whenever she wants; she's never stood up. It's a simulated romance, which some women like. Sort of like virtual love."

A very elegant woman in her late forties, wearing a black dress, came over to sit next to Aida while we were talking. She removed a cigarette from her purse quietly, and no sooner had the cigarette grazed her lip than Aida was lighting it for her with a bright red chrome Zippo. He introduced me to her, and she offered me her hand, which I, not knowing what to do, kissed. Aida gave me a broad smile of approval.

We made small talk while Aida retrieved drinks for us from the bar. I was surprised he didn't order one of the unoccupied hosts to

do it; maybe he was trying to impress upon me the importance of being a good host.

I will be honest. I envisioned myself walking into the host club and beautiful women gathering around me while I lit their cigarettes and made them feel desirable. I figured they'd be fascinated by my gaijin charm and my mastery of the nuances of the Japanese language. I'd entertain them with stories of my career, and they'd listen, fascinated, begging for my business card and secretly desiring my body. In reality, I was more or less ignored. Obviously, the women coming to a host club are looking for an attractive Japanese man, not a goofy Jewish-American in an expensive suit.

I did pour drinks for a Filipino hostess, I did listen to a housewife complain about her husband while I kept lighting her cigarettes, which she smoked in rapid succession, and I did have a hostly encounter. But I ended up spending more time chatting with other hosts while on their coffee break.

Kazu, age twenty-nine, formerly worked for a pharmaceutical company. "In one sense," he told me, "you're appealing to their motherly instinct. You treat them like a queen, and if they like you, they make you their favorite, their number one host.

"I love this job. I'm raking in six hundred thousand yen [about $6,000] a month, and that doesn't include the presents I get. One woman bought me this gold-plated Rolex on my wrist. I think the wife of a banker, who is totally into me, is going to buy me a car for my birthday. You want to let the customers know your birthday way in advance because it's like bonus time if you work at a company. I prefer cash, but usually they give you expensive designer gifts. I pawn some stuff, but things like clothes and watches, well, they expect you to wear them.

"This woman, Mariko, is the president of a firm that makes men's underwear—funny if you think about it because most of her clients are gay and she's paying me to pour her drinks. She gave me a Patek Philippe for my birthday. Expensive as hell but a horribly gaudy

diamond-studded thing. She doesn't know anything about watches, only how much they cost. I bought a rip-off in Hong Kong and pawned the original. If she shows up, I slip on the fake watch.

"But I don't feel like I'm exploiting her—or any of these women. I'm fulfilling their fantasy. It's like having an affair with me, even if we're not sleeping together. They feel happy if I'm happy. If everyone is happy, no one is exploited. There's no pretense. They understand that I'm their friend only until their money runs out."

Hikaru, twenty-five, born in Kobe, had been a host since he was eighteen. At six feet three, he was very tall for a Japanese man. He was quite a specimen: he had the glow of someone who'd just come out of a tanning salon, his nails were manicured, his teeth were perfect and white, and his suit probably cost my monthly salary.

Maybe he was getting bored with the job, because he wanted to know all about my life as a reporter, even asking if one could be a journalist without a college education. But obviously he wasn't suffering as a host, where looks were important and he looked good. "Sometimes," he said, "the thing to do is to find an actor you resemble and then basically do an impression of the guy. You make the customer feel like she is with a celebrity.

"But most of the time I say that I'm a graduate student in law at Tokyo University and I'm just hosting to pay the tuition. It makes the customer feel like she's contributing to society, not just to my wallet. Maybe she fantasizes about someday being able to tell her friends about a famous lawyer who used to be a host and she was his favorite customer.

"You have to compliment women skillfully. You can't just throw around generic lines. You don't want to say things that make them feel old. You tell a woman that her skin is flawless. The back of her neck is so erotic. You love the way her face dimples up when she smiles. If she has freckles, you ask her if she's part Caucasian. Some women like to be thought of as looking international. If you make the compliments unique to them, their eyes light up. I think that all

women have their charms; you just have to look for them and recognize them.

“I prefer women in their thirties. You can have a conversation with them. If you have someone who is very funny and cracks a lot of jokes, it’s good to talk about something serious. And vice versa. It shows you appreciate her hidden, other side.

“You have to be able to talk to customers about almost anything, even where they should send their kids to school. So I subscribe to four women’s magazines to make sure I know what kinds of concerns they have. They also like to talk about television programs, but since I don’t have time to watch TV I stay current by reading TV guides.

“In this business, though, looks are the main thing. I know I have to look desirable. I go to the gym four times a week. I do weight training and aerobics, and I swim to keep myself slim and fit. Women don’t like muscle-bound men. They like a tennis player physique. I use skin care products and a warm towel before shaving to make sure my skin looks smooth. Some men look good with a little stubble; I’m not one of them. Women compliment me on my skin and my looks all the time.

“I make about a million yen [roughly $10,000] a month. That’s a lot, but there are a lot of costs. You have to live in a nice apartment, you always have to dress stylishly, you have to buy gifts for the clients. That’s all out of your pocket, and you can’t be cheap about the gifts either. Sometimes it feels like the more clients you have, the less money you make. Still, I manage to save about four hundred thousand yen [$4,000] a month, which is more than a lot of people earn, so I can’t complain.

“The bad thing is that my parents hate that I do this, even if I don’t plan on doing it forever. You don’t have a personal life. Every day is like summer vacation, except that you really don’t have the freedom. You spend most of your free time waiting on customers in one way or another; sometimes you go shopping with a customer, sometimes you go to a resort with her.

“It’s hard to have a girlfriend, too. Girls don’t like to date a guy who works as a host. I think I can understand that. How is she going to know if what I say is for real or an act? Sometimes I don’t know the difference. Even if I’m with a girl I really like, I sometimes find myself trying to play the angles, trying to manipulate her.”

Our conversation was interrupted as a client of Hikaru’s entered the club. He rose to greet her, a dazzling, genuine smile on his face. Michiko, who was wearing a green dress, had her hair pulled back and secured with a black velvet hair band. She was elegant and composed.

Hikaru introduced me to her, and after we exchanged the usual greetings and she determined that I appeared to have some command of Japanese, she asked if I had a cigarette. I offered her what I had and then, a little shakily, lit it for her. She inhaled and closed her eyes, leaning back in the sofa. She was quiet for about ten seconds. Hikaru winked at me.

As Michiko opened her eyes, she exclaimed, “The taste is so sweet. The smell is almost like incense. Where are they from?”

“Indonesia,” I replied. “They’re Indonesian clove cigarettes.”

“I like them. Are you Indonesian?”

“American. I have a face that’s hard to place.”

“It’s a nice face.”

“Nowhere near as nice as yours.”

This shameless compliment caused Michiko to giggle and Hikaru to raise an eyebrow at me and smile.

As Michiko brought the cigarette to her lips again, I went on. “You have lovely hands. Your fingers are so long and lithe. They look delicate but strong. Do you play the piano?”

At this, Michiko burst into laughter and slapped Hikaru on the knees. “Your friend is very perceptive. Did you tell him?” she asked.

Hikaru shook his head and made comical denials.

The ice broken, Michiko, Hikaru, and I chatted for a while (Hikaru really was good at his job), and then Michiko left for the evening. It was almost four in the morning, and the place was filling up. The new crowd seemed to be mostly hostesses who had just gotten off work; all were dressed to the nines, many were fairly inebriated, a few were loud. I wouldn't think that this would be where a hostess would want to head after hours, but then again, if you thought about it, it made sense.

I should have stayed for the after-five crowd, but I had a day job. As I was gathering my things, Hikaru asked if I wouldn't mind leaving the rest of my cigarettes. "Of course," I said, then asked, "How'd I do?"

His response: "You have a charm, but you really are a geek. You want to talk more about yourself than you want to listen to others, but you tell interesting stories, so I'm not sure that's a minus. You're also memorable and mildly amusing, and that's a plus. The clove cigarettes are a nice touch. They smell good and they're different, and they are one more thing that makes you memorable. I may start smoking them myself."

He added that if I ever got tired of journalism I might have a fallback as a host. I laughed and thanked him and looked around to say sayonara to Aida.

Aida handed me a couple of coupons and urged me to come back anytime with some female colleagues. I myself didn't return, but my colleagues apparently had a fine time.

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Almost ten years later, Kabukicho isn't quite like it used to be, but it is still a pretty shady place. The promise of encounters, danger, adventure, and erotic fulfillment is readily available if you just know which door on which floor in which building to knock on. Underneath all that, however, is the stink of isolation.

Tokyo is one of the most densely populated cities in the world, yet —or maybe because of it—there are so many people who have no

one to confide in, no one to trust or burden with their secrets, worries, or disappointments.

There is, admittedly, the underlying game that's the lure (but where is it not?): is this evening of sympathy and champagne going to lead to sexual intercourse? Be that as it may, what the clubs are really fueled by is alienation, boredom, and loneliness.

The rates are not unreasonable, but the costs in human terms are incredibly high.

Whatever Happened to Lucie Blackman?

I had to make a call to Tim Blackman, in Britain. I'd promised I would.

He wanted to know what had happened to his daughter Lucie as soon as I did. Mr. Blackman had so alienated the Tokyo Metropolitan Police in his quest to find her that he was the last person they would talk to about anything. They knew that anything they told him would be told to the press, and they didn't like it. He realized they weren't going to keep him up to date. He wanted to hear from someone he knew, rather than read about it in the paper. I'd promised that when there was definite news I would call and tell him, day or night, anytime. This was the time.

Lucie Blackman, his oldest daughter, had gone missing on July 1, 2000. I didn't know it then, but the case would be a pivotal moment in my career. There was a whole world of sleaze and sexual exploitation beneath the veneer of Japan's happy-go-lucky, in-your-face sex industry that I didn't know anything about. The words "human trafficking" weren't in my vocabulary or even in my realm of awareness. It would be years after this case that I finally made sense of what I would see while looking for Lucie.

Lucie, a British national, came to Japan on May 4, 2000. She had been working as a stewardess for British Airways part-time, but her best friend, Louise Phillips, had convinced her that there were good times to be had and good money to be made by coming to Japan and working as a hostess. Lucie had piled up some debts in Britain and the stewardess gig was leaving her feeling constantly tired because of her problems dealing with jet lag. A "paid vacation" or "working holiday" sounded good to her.

Louise's sister had spent a few years in Japan working as a hostess; she knew the tricks of the trade and the profit potential. Lucie and Louise arrived in Japan together on tourist visas and promptly found lodging in a dodgy gaijin house—an apartment building where the majority of the residents were foreigners, the deposits were low, and the usual honorarium to the landlord, "key money," wasn't required. The checks on visas were almost nonexistent.

Legally, you cannot work in Japan on a tourist visa. In reality, at the time it was generally tolerated by the authorities. Most foreign girls working as hostesses in Japan then were made to understand, after a few weeks, that they were working illegally because that way the management could use it as leverage in salary negotiations and anything else that came up.

Tall and blond, Lucie was an amazingly attractive woman. She and Louise headed for Roppongi. Roppongi, which literally means "Six Trees," has long been the gathering place where foreigners in Japan and Japanese who want to mingle with foreigners meet, merge, and mate. In the bubbly late eighties, it was a high-dollar area with elaborate discos that charged $30 just to get in the door and had rigid dress codes as well. However, when the bubble crashed, so did the doors keeping out the riffraff, and gradually the area was taken over by cheaper hostess pubs, small nightclubs, sexual massage parlors, prostitution bars, after-hour bars where drugs were readily available, and huge clubs catering to the pond scum of the foreign population with cheap booze and no entrance fees. The classy clubs had moved toward Nishi-Azabu, leaving the old Roppongi to stew in its juices.

Some nameless Japanese neophyte of English had nicknamed Roppongi "High-Touch Town." The emblem is engraved into the wall of a concrete overpass that runs over Roppongi Crossing. It is in many ways similar to Kabukicho but seedier and full of gaijin: thus, the "Gaijin Kabukicho." The Azabu police had long since lost interest in cleaning the area up because if there were any crimes going on there, the victims were mostly foreigners. When Lucie

arrived, the area was really just beginning to turn from seedy to sleazy.

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By the ninth, Lucie and Louise were both working at Casablanca, a hostess club, just catty-corner to Seventh Heaven, Roppongi's first foreign female strip bar. There were nine other girls working at the club at the time, all of them blond except Louise. Their pay was 5,000 yen, roughly $50 an hour. The pay was supplemented by drinkbacks[1*] as well as specific requests for an individual.

Three weeks later, on July 1, Lucie called Louise from Shibuya, telling her, "I'm meeting a customer from the club, and he's going to buy me a cell phone. I'm so excited." In the evening she called Louise again to tell her that she was on the way home, but she never made it,

On July 3, Louise got a very strange call on her cell phone. It was from a Japanese man calling himself "Akira Takagi." He told Louise, "Lucie has entered a cult in Chiba Prefecture. She can't come home. Don't worry about her."

Now Louise was very worried. She went to the British Embassy and asked for advice and then went to the Azabu police station to file a missing persons report. The Azabu police did not want to take the case from the outset. However, the embassy had been notified and the mysterious phone call was impossible to ignore. If it hadn't been for that phone call, there might never have been a real investigation. On the ninth, the TMPD Investigative Division (homicide, robberies and other violent crimes) officially decided to take over the case. It was out of the hands of the local cops and now a problem for headquarters.

Around that time, I got a call from a senior police reporter, Nishijima, aka Pablo, asking me to help cover the story, though it wasn't really a story yet; the TMPD hadn't made an official announcement, and the *Yomiuri* was just beginning its prep work.

The details of Lucie's disappearance were still very vague. Pablo warned me to keep my mouth shut about it for the time being.

I liked Pablo a lot; he was a good reporter and a gentleman to boot. Yamamoto and Pablo were both on the TMPD police beat, covering violent crimes and international crimes (Investigative Division 1 and International Crimes Division). Pablo was Yamamoto's right-hand man.

Pablo didn't look like a Japanese guy. He had an American ancestor somewhere in his family tree, giving him an almost Latin look. One of our coworkers used to joke that there were really three foreigners in the National News Department: a Mongolian (Yamamoto), a Jew (myself), and a Mexican (Pablo).

On the phone, Pablo was refreshingly point-blank: "Well, Jake, it looks like you might actually be useful for a change. The victim is a foreigner and all her friends are foreigners. We need someone who can blend in and also talk to people who know her and her family. That would be you. Are you interested?"

Absolutely, I assured him.

Honestly, at the time I thought the whole thing was being overblown. I assumed that Lucie was just another gaijin hostess who had taken off to Thailand or Bali with her boyfriend or her sugar daddy and just forgotten to notify anyone.

Nonetheless, I applied for permission to abandon my usual duties and help the TMPD team for a few weeks. On July 9, when the investigation officially began, I went to the TMPD headquarters, was waved in, and went up to the ninth floor. Pablo and Yamamoto were waiting for me. Misawa, the boss and captain of the TMPD press club, was passed out on the couch. The office looked the same as it had in 1993, although the copy of Madonna's *Sex* had long since vanished from the bookshelf.

Yamamoto was in good spirits and greeted me warmly. "Jake, long time no see. Still doing heroin?"

"No, Yamamoto. I'm just selling it to schoolchildren now. I don't use anymore."

“Is that so? No wonder you’re getting so fat.”

It was true. Not that I had stopped doing heroin (or ever had done heroin), but I had gotten pretty fat.

Yamamoto, on the other hand, had lost a lot of weight—perhaps too much. Of all the assignments you can get on the police beat, the homicide/violent crimes beat is the toughest. It had taken its toll on him. Vice isn’t an easy beat, but you rarely get called out in the middle of the night for a bust. Vice is not a spontaneous crime. I learned this covering the Fourth District. The social impact of a police raid on a sex club or the seizure of pornographic DVDs was nominal at best and not the kind of news story that required immediate and deep coverage. Most of the time, what the vice squad did, if it was announced at all, never made it into the newspapers. Oh, you had to write up the articles but with the understanding that it was more than likely to be work in vain. Homicide and violent crimes are different. In a country where murders are rare, they are almost always big stories. They happen and are discovered at odd, inconvenient hours, and as news stories they have a real immediacy. You have to be on the scene quickly, and the competition is fierce to get a scoop on those kinds of sensational stories. I didn’t envy Yamamoto.

Pablo, on the other hand, probably because he was the guy on the ground floor rather than the middle manager, seemed to be entirely in his element. He quickly brought me up to speed on the case, referring to his notes. The cops had the following intel on Lucie at that point in time:

On the day Lucie vanished, she was last seen wearing a black dress with black sandals and a black bag. Her wallet was of brown alligator skin and folded in half, with a little change inside. She wore a heart-shaped diamond necklace and a square Armani wristwatch. She had worked for close to a year and a half for British Airways as a flight attendant. Her father had not forbidden her to go to Japan; Lucie had money, and he’d sent her money as well. She had told her parents it was possible to go sightseeing in Japan and earn a little money doing odd jobs. She did not intend to stay long.

The TMPD did not believe the cult story, especially in the context of the previous events. The homicide cops were already convinced that she'd probably been kidnapped and killed by one of the customers from the club. They were highly doubtful that Akira Takagi even existed; he was more than likely a fake identity created by the person responsible for her disappearance.

They were putting some guys from the homicide squad on the case, including a few detectives who spoke English (or who couldn't really but wanted to speak English) and had experience with sex crimes. Pablo gave me the names of the detectives in charge. I knew one of them already.

Yamamoto came over to join us while Pablo continued the briefing.

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

Yamamoto took the lead. "We want you to go talk to people at the gaijin house she was staying at and start looking around Roppongi for people who knew her, for anyone who might have been a customer. You must have some friends there, right?"

In actuality, I avoided Roppongi like the plague. Most of my friends were Japanese. I was more comfortable hanging out in Kabukicho, Shibuya, Ebisu, or even Korea Town. I had Sunao, so I didn't need to or want to pick up an easy Roppongi girl for some no-strings-attached sex. I didn't do drugs, nor did I have a fascination with big-breasted foreign strippers, discos, or expensive restaurants. I had no desire to fraternize with other gaijin. Roppongi was as foreign to me as it was to Pablo or Yamamoto.

So I told that to Yamamoto.

He just shook his head. "You're an American, and you don't go to Roppongi and you don't know the rules of baseball. You must not be a real American. You're really a North Korean spy, aren't you. Confess."

Pablo joined in. "Even I go to Roppongi now and then, and I'm Japanese."

“Pablo-san, you look more like a foreigner than I do. This is why people call you Pablo. You belong in Roppongi. I’m sure the Filipino girls love you.”

“Is that so, Adelstein? Hey, at least I don’t look like an Iranian.”

While Pablo and I were trading crude insults about our ethnic appearances, Yamamoto pulled a wad of cash out of his pocket and handed it to me.

“What’s this for?”

“I don’t go to Roppongi much,” explained Yamamoto, “but I know one thing. It’s an expensive playground. Get receipts, if you can.”

I had no idea where to start looking, but I figured Lucie’s old club would be the best place. Unfortunately, when I arrived, there was a sign on the door stating CLOSED FOR RENOVATION. Not an auspicious start.

On July 12, the TMPD officially announced that it was conducting an investigation into the disappearance of Lucie Blackman. The Japanese newspaper coverage was subdued, but within days it became a major story in England.

I was spending every night in Roppongi scouring the streets for anyone who knew Lucie. I came across as so horribly geeky and uncomfortable that no one would talk to me. I had spent so much time immersed in an all-Japanese environment that I was having trouble speaking English. I stuttered. I probably sounded like a Japanese person trying to speak English. I must have given off a cop vibe.

And then around July 20, 2000, a very strange letter was delivered to the Azabu police, supposedly from Lucie Blackman herself.

The letter was postmarked from Chiba Prefecture, where Lucie was supposedly undergoing spiritual training. It told the police and her family to give up searching for her. The Azabu cops thought it was either a cheap prank or an attempt by the assailant to divert the investigation. One of the cops on the squad, whom I knew from the

Fourth District, showed me the letter and asked me for my opinion. The cop had a strange name for a Japanese guy, so weird that he had to write the reading of it on his meishi so that people could make sense of it. I also think he had a thyroid condition, because his eyes literally bulged out of his head. His fellow cops, noticing this as cops are prone to do, nicknamed him Googly.

It was clear to me that the letter had been written by a Japanese person posing as a native speaker. The misuse of *"a"* and "the" and the stiffness of the prose, combined with a penchant for double negatives, clearly indicated that it had been written by a Japanese national. It was not a bad attempt but not a convincing one either. If I'd gotten anything out of teaching English conversation in Japan, it was a working knowledge of the quirks of Japanese English, aka Japlish. I explained as much to Googly, and he seemed convinced.

The next day Tim Blackman set up a special hotline to collect information regarding Lucie.

The first week of August came and went. Lucie had come to Japan on a ninety-day tourist visa. If she was still in Japan, she was now an illegal alien.

Tim Blackman came back to Japan, and it was a media circus. At a press conference at the British Embassy, he announced a reward of 1.5 million yen (about $15,000) for information leading to the rescue or discovery of Lucie. Meanwhile, the police were slowly uncovering the true identity of the mysterious Akira Takagi but still had no information on the current whereabouts of Lucie.

Lucie's birthday came on September 1. She would have been twenty-two.

I still had nothing solid on Lucie either. The only thing that sounded promising was information about a man who went by the name of Yuji. Yuji had long hair tinged with gray. He was a frequent customer at the foreign hostess clubs in Roppongi, Akasaka, and Ginza. He dressed well and spent copious amounts of money in every club he visited; he preferred blondes. No one had seen Yuji

since late June. No one had his business card, and no one had a photo of him either.

• • •

Getting information about Lucie would require fitting into the Roppongi nightlife. It couldn't be done by declaring myself a reporter. A lot of the foreigners there were working illegally. They didn't trust cops or journos. So I created a fake identity.

I couldn't pretend to be a counterculture, hip, cool gaijin guy/DJ/English teacher on the prowl in Roppongi. I'm not the type. The best I could hope for was to be perceived as another well-paid, sleazy foreign businessman. The phenotype was in ample supply, so it wasn't hard to learn to imitate them. I got a better suit, took off my necktie, chatted up the girls in the bars, and stopped asking too many questions. I contemplated getting an earring, but that seemed as though it would be too much.

I made up a fake name for myself and an occupation that was close to what I was really doing: an insurance investigator. I made a fake business card, got a second cell phone, and spent every weekend in the dregs of Roppongi looking for someone who knew Lucie or the customer who'd taken her to the seaside.

I took the information about Yuji and passed it to my boss; I also passed it along to Googly. I thought about sharing my source with Pablo but couldn't get myself to do it. Sources are things you can't help but hoard for yourself.

The only other solid piece of information I had was that Yuji used to frequent a place called Club Codex. I went to check it out. It was run by a Japanese man called Slick.

As soon as I walked into Club Codex, I knew there was something a little different going on. Oh, it appeared to be a typical hostess club. It had the low lights, the fake potted plants, the velvety sofas and tables, the crystal decanters of whiskey and water perched on tables. However, the clientele seemed a little scruffier than most and the Eastern European women there did not seem to be enjoying

themselves. Their smiles were forced; they seemed skittish. At that time, I had no idea what was really going on in the club; later I did. I casually mentioned Yuji to one of the girls and was asked to leave almost immediately. I took that as confirmation that Yuji had been there and that they were aware he was under investigation or going to be under investigation. I had one other piece of information from the trip. The Estonian girl who'd been chatting me up had said, "Yuji? It sounds like you're talking about Georgie."

Georgie? Yuji? The same guy with different aliases? I had no idea.

I'm not sure the police made contact with Slick after I passed on my information to them or whether Slick made contact with the police on his own. In any event, around this time, Slick began spilling his guts to the TMPD.

A few years before, one of Slick's girls had been raped by "Yuji," a frequent customer at the bar. Yuji had invited her on a leisurely drive to the coast, then taken her to the Izu Marina in Yokohama. Finally he took her to his apartment in Zushi, plied her with wine that was drugged, and then raped her. She'd been furious and wanted to go to the police. Slick had apparently talked her out of it. He had not forbidden Yuji to come to the club after the incident but had warned the girls to be wary of him. He passed along the name of the marina where his employee had been taken and all the information he had. It turned out to be a break for the investigation.

The other name that kept coming up in talks with the locals was Joji Obara. Obara was a rich real estate owner and property developer, age forty-eight, who frequented the foreign hostess clubs in Roppongi on a regular basis. He sounded a lot like Yuji. I passed on what I had heard to the cops. They had already heard about him.

By October 1, Obara was definitely a suspect. On October 12, the police arrested him for sexual assault in a different case.

The press release was very succinct:

During the course of the initial investigation, a number of assaults against foreign women came to light. In these cases, the perpetrator would approach the foreign women and suggest,

"Let's go look at the ocean" and skillfully verbally entice them into going on a drive. He would give them alcoholic drinks laced with drugs and, after clouding their consciousness, would rape them. We were able to identify the man responsible and arrest him on the twelfth of this month.

The use of narcotics to incapacitate mostly foreign women and rape them repeatedly is an extremely malevolent crime. The MO used on these women bears a strong resemblance to the circumstances of Lucie Blackman's disappearance.

The impact of this crime within Japan and internationally is huge. Therefore, we are expanding the original special investigation unit into a full-fledged Special Investigation Headquarters and devoting more than a hundred officers to getting to the bottom of these cases.

The man believed to be responsible is Joji Obara, age 48, a company executive.

He was arrested for sexual assault against a person unable to resist. He is charged with sexually assaulting a foreign woman (age 23 at the time) in March 1996. He met the women at a hostess club in the Fifth Section of Roppongi. He suggested they go look at the ocean, inviting her for a drive, and took her to his apartment in Kanagawa Prefecture. He convinced her to enter his apartment, where he made her drink alcohol and caused her to lose consciousness for several hours and, during that period, sexually assaulted her.

After the press release was issued, a very short press conference was held. Here's how it went:

CHIEF DETECTIVE: Lucie's connection with Obara's offense has not been established yet. However, the method of approach is similar, which is to invite women to go to the ocean. This is why it is necessary to build up our formation to about one hundred detectives. It will be a large-scale operation because there are many sources of evidence.

Q: How many other complaints have there been?

A: A number. Some women have called in. If we expand the investigation, someone may press charges with the police.

Q: What about the victims all being foreigners?

A: There are some Japanese, too, who are in the middle of discussion. They are debating whether to make a report or not.

Q: Are they all hostesses?

A: They were at the time.

Q: How many articles have been confiscated?

A: A lot. About a few thousand. About a one-ton truckful. I can't say how many precisely.

Q: What is there most of?

A: Some books that are thought to have enticed him. Some documents and videos. We are not dealing with simple sexual assault here but serial assault. Keep that in mind.

Q: What are the drugs?

A: Sleep-inducing drugs have been confirmed.

Q: Halcion?

A: That and other kinds.

Q: Where were they found?

A: Some places related to him.

Q: How large is the investigation?

A: About one hundred detectives.

Q: Who are the principal detectives?

A: (Names four principal detectives.)

Q: Who are the section heads?

A: (Names four section heads.) That is how much effort Division One is putting into this.

Q: Is the special investigative headquarters set up at the Azabu police station?

A: Yes. The confiscated articles are at the TMPD headquarters. Azabu is for information gathering.

I think Googly summed Obara up best: “He’s a sick fuck.”

The prosecutors would later conclude that “from as early as 1973, Obara would repeatedly lure women into his apartment in Zushi and give them drinks laced with drugs that caused sleepiness or impaired functioning, and when they would lose consciousness he would engage them in illicit sex (or sexually assault them) and then record the acts on videotape or other medium. He called this ‘subjugation play.’”

The case of one of the first victims to come forward was a template of Obara’s crimes. It’s dry and detached, but this is the pattern.

From the Prosecutor’s Opening Statements in one of the Obara trials:

Relationship Between the Defendant and the Victim

The victim of this case (hereinafter referred to as “victim”) came to Japan on February 20, 1998, and resided in the Shibuya Ward of Tokyo. She worked part time at night as a hostess in Roppongi, Minato Ward.

The defendant met the victim in early March of the same year, when he went to the club she worked at and was served by her.

Situation of the Crime

The defendant told the victim, “I have an apartment along the coast right outside Tokyo, so I’ll take you there. I’ll cook for you, so let’s go on the weekend,” and on March 31, around noon, he met the victim in front of the Akasaka Tokyu Hotel and drove her to his established address in Zushi, videotaping her with the ocean in the background.

Afterward, the defendant and the victim went to his apartment at Izu Marina Building Number 4, room number 4314. After eating seafood together in the living room, the

defendant told the victim, "I have some wine made from Philippine herbs," and poured her a drink with a sleep-inducing drug. The victim took one sip and gradually lost consciousness.

The defendant carried the unconscious victim into the bedroom and laid her on his bed on her back. After taking off her pants and her underwear, he placed a cloth soaked in a drunkenness-inducing drug over her mouth and prolonged her unconscious state. In this state, he raped her, videotaping the entire thing.

Situation After the Crime

The next night, April 1, the victim regained consciousness on top of the bed in just a bathrobe. She had a severe headache and was dizzy and nauseous. Moreover, she did not have any strength in her body and crawled from the bed to the bathroom, vomiting into the toilet bowl.

In order to conceal the assault, the defendant said to the victim, "What a fun girl you are. You drank an entire bottle of vodka and threw up all over yourself. That's why I took off your clothes and put you in the bath," and made her listen to a tape recording of somebody bathing and her groaning.

Afterward, the defendant drove the victim home and she threw up twice during the ride. The defendant said to the victim, "You won't be able to work at the club for two, three days in that state. Let me pay you for the work you'll miss," and paid her for three days of work at 60,000 yen.

The victim's dizziness and nausea continued, and she was absent from work at the club from April 1 to April 4 for a total of four days.

Steps to the Prosecution

The victim did not know the defendant's name or address and was not even aware that she had been raped because she had lost consciousness. In the beginning of July 2000, she met with an acquaintance who manages a restaurant in Tokyo, who told her about a British woman who said she was going to go see one of her customers who offered to take her to the ocean and has been missing since. At that time, the victim told the acquaintance, "A while back, a guy named Kazu invited me to the ocean and I went with him. He made me take a drug, and I lost consciousness." After explaining the events that had followed, the acquaintance advised her to go to the police.

On August 9, 2000, the victim went to the Azabu police station and reported the circumstances of the crime. On August 13, the victim identified a photograph of the defendant, and on the twenty-ninth, although the circumstances of the crime were still uncertain, the defendant was charged with assault against an incapacitated person.

On October 12, 2000, a search and seizure of the defendant was ordered, and among the defendant's many videotapes was a recording of the circumstances of the crime. On the twenty-third, the victim was informed of the details of the crime by a prosecuting counsel at the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office and for the first time acknowledged the circumstances of the crime as a sexual assault against an incapacitated person. On the same day, the prosecuting counsel of the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office charged the defendant with sexual assault against an incapacitated person.

That was what he'd done—allegedly more than a hundred times.[2*]

After October 16, with each passing day, more and more evidence surfaced proving that Obara was a serial rapist and also connecting him to Lucie's disappearance. After Lucie vanished, Obara showed up at an apartment in Miura that he had not used for years. He was spotted with his hands covered in concrete. He refused to let the caretaker of the apartment into his room. He was caught trying to change the lock of the caretaker's apartment; he had mistaken it for his own. He was seen at a nearby beach with a shovel.

The caretaker was suspicious and reported him to the police. When they showed up, Obara would not let them in. Traces of concrete were found in his apartment.

Of course, a lot of people wondered why the police hadn't searched his apartment then. There were no good answers.

In October, before his arrest, Obara purchased an expensive motorboat without even bothering to look at it. The TMPD believed that he was planning to use the boat to destroy evidence linking him to the crime.

The police analyzed the drugs taken from Obara's homes and found several different kinds of sleeping pills, which were probably used in sexually assaulting not only foreign women but Japanese women too.

Once it leaked out that the victims had included Japanese women, the media frenzy increased.

The most damning evidence was the videotapes. The police were able to confirm more than a hundred videotapes of Obara sexually assaulting mostly Caucasian women. The tapes were recorded on 8 mm and VHS cartridges. The police had collected the tapes from his former home in Setagaya Ward as well as his second home, a condominium in the Zushi area of Kanagawa Prefecture. All of the women appeared to be unconscious and unable to resist Obara's assaults.

Lucie was not on any of the tapes. The tapes were in semichronological order, but no tapes had been made around the period when Lucie had vanished. At the end of October, the Tokyo District Public Prosecutor's Office officially indicted Obara on the first of many charges.

Unfortunately, Obara was still not talking. No one should have been surprised. The man had graduated from the law department of Keio University. He knew the law, and he knew how the police worked.

The cops tried the standard ploy: "If you don't tell us where Lucie is buried, her spirit will never rest in peace."

It didn't work. Not only did Obara initially refuse to admit knowing Lucie at all, he claimed that all the victims had been paid prostitutes who had willingly consented to having sex with him.

The big question was still this: had anyone seen Obara and Lucie together?

I was supposed to find out. If we could find a witness to that, not only would we have a scoop but we'd have something to trade with

the cops, information they wanted. It would be the equivalent of two scoops.

Yamamoto had high hopes that I would get something.

"Adelstein," he said, patting me on the back while we sat at the counter of Propaganda in Roppongi, "do you know the saying *'ja no michi wa hebi'?"*

"Yes. I think in English that would be translated as 'the snake knows the way of the serpent.'"

"Exactly. You're a gaijin, the victim is a gaijin, the victim's family are gaijin, the witnesses are probably gaijin. Obara himself is probably Korean-Japanese, making him also a gaijin, so you're the perfect reporter to follow the story from the nonpolice side. Bring me back something good."

"I'll do my best."

"Don't do your best. Use your brain. Get results. Effort doesn't count for shit. I appreciate it, but it's the results that count."

"All right, I'll do a half-assed job, but I'll bring back something interesting."

"Exactly."

He bought me another drink and then headed off to try to catch one of the detectives at his home.

I had now spent several weeks going to hostess bars and strip bars in Roppongi. At first it was kind of exciting and fun. Enough alcohol and pheromones could make you forget that ultimately what you were researching was something tragic and sinister. Nudity, sexy dances, flirtation, alcohol, the scent of sweat and perfume, being fondled by women clearly above my pay grade, having my shoulders rubbed and having the *Yomiuri* pay for it all—it was not unpleasant.

After a week, though, the appeal faded. You notice the lines under the women's eyes, you get to know their backgrounds, you see the bruises on their arms. You can hear the Japanese managers discussing the women like so many cattle. If you're approachable,

which I am, the girls will began to tell you how the system really works. They're not enjoying themselves and many of the girls working there see you as an enemy to be crushed, a con to be milked. Not fun anymore.

My daughter, Beni, was born in September of that year, and I would have preferred to be home, hanging out with Sunao and interacting with the little rug rat, but instead I was spending every night in sleazy, poorly lit bars. Sunao knew where I was going and she understood the job, so it didn't bother her much. She'd been a journalist herself, and she knew that when I'd become a shakaibu reporter, if we had children, she'd essentially be a single mother.

I remember sitting in Private Eyes one night, an Indian woman with gigantic breasts on my lap. As she stuffed her nipples into my face, I could think only one thing: I wonder if Beni is breast-feeding right now?

I made repeated trips to Outline.[3*] Obara had been a frequent customer there, and the owner had a picture of him, one less than twenty years old. I made no bones about being a reporter from my first visit; I knew he could tell. But he let me talk to the women as long as I paid for their company. There were women who knew Obara and some who knew Lucie as well. Lucie, because she was tall and friendly, had made a name for herself in a small area of Roppongi. She was well liked. I found one girl who knew Obara and Lucie, but no one who had seen them together. I kept getting that hammered into my head by my boss: find someone who can connect the two, and we'll have a scoop.

According to the manager of Outline, when Obara had come to the club he always had a bodyguard with him, a thuggish-looking guy who also doubled as his driver. He was a short, sturdy guy. The mama-san said that Obara and his bodyguard looked a lot alike, except Obara had longer hair tinged with gray.

She added that Obara had a Korean face as well.

“What’s a Korean face look like?” I asked the mama-san.

“Someone with a face like Obara’s bodyguard.”

Obara’s face was more square than round, she added; he didn’t talk much, and he seemed kind of gloomy. This information wasn’t very helpful.

I went to Seventh Heaven, thinking maybe Lucie had made friends with some of the girls there. The foreign worker community in Roppongi at the time was very small.

The basic setup of the club was typical of most strip clubs in the area; a small round wooden stage with a pole, slightly elevated, with a curtain behind it. The room was very dark; speakers were built into the ceiling. Groups of seats and sofas were situated around the stage. On the far left was the private dance area, blocked off by a thick curtain. There were three booths in the private dance area, with armless chairs in each booth.

During a private dance, the customer sits and the girl gyrates on top of him, in dry-hump fashion, for the duration of one song—for 7,000 yen. She might tongue your ear or feel up your crotch, but no more than that. Squeezing breasts is permitted but nippling (sucking on the breasts) is acceptable only for a regular customer or someone who has paid for at least three private dances. It was just understood.

There was one girl, Mindy, who would always talk to me. Greedy Mindy. She was the only redhead in the place, short with huge breasts (maybe natural) and quite attractive in an Irish sort of way. She could milk a customer like a dairymaid with a fecund cow. I bought her some drinks, and while she sat on my lap, she whispered in my ear what was happening. She said that that evening, right before the club had opened, two detectives from the TMPD had visited the club and shown the manager a black-and-white photo. There were two men in the photo, one with his arm around the other guy’s shoulder; the man in the center you could see clearly; the other guy’s face was cropped out of the picture.

The police asked the manager if he recognized the man, and the manager said he did. Mindy hadn't heard the rest of the conversation. The man was Obara.

The *Yomiuri* wanted more information.

It wasn't easy to get. The women didn't like reporters. One very attractive potential source called me "an asshole" to my face. Ouch.

I spent the night of October 14 trying a new tactic. As a customer I wasn't getting too far, and I decided that what I needed was a proxy, someone the girls would be less wary of. I called up Kristin, a tall, buxom, blond Montana girl, and asked her to help me out. She was married to my best friend from college. She was actually excited to play private eye and met me in Roppongi the same night after finishing her job teaching English.

Here is the cover story and the plan we'd worked out: Kristin would be looking for a job as a hostess/stripper, and I would be her boyfriend. The City News Department was running out of money, and by visiting the clubs for "job interviews" we would get in free and maybe get some valuable intelligence.

Mindy was sitting at a table by herself when we got to Seventh Heaven. The manager had us wait inside while he called his boss to set up an impromptu interview. They were always looking for new, big-breasted blond women to display, and Kristin fit the bill.

As soon as Kristin and I sat down, Mindy sat herself between the two of us.

She turned to me.

"Well, who's your lovely friend? I'm Mindy."

"I'm Kristin," my friend answered. "I'm thinking of working here. How's the job?"

"Well," said Mindy, now knee to knee with Kristin, "if you like men, it's a good job. Good pay. Although, men, men, men all the time. It gets a little boring. Men are so hard, so cold."

As Mindy was lamenting the coldness of men, her hands went to Kristin's knees and then up to Kristin's breasts. Gently kneading them, she leaned forward, her lips approaching Kristin's neck—and then I snapped the back of Mindy's bra, hard, and she pulled back. Kristin was looking uncomfortable. She sipped from the glass of orange juice the bartender had brought her.

"Why'd you have to do that?" Mindy glared at me and puffed out her lower lip, pouting. "I know," she said, suddenly looking happy. "You're jealous. You don't want to share me with your girlfriend. I'll give you a special, long private dance just so you know you still have a special place in my heart."

"I'm not here for a private dance tonight."

Mindy wasn't fazed. She slipped her arm around Kristin's shoulder, playing with her hair, adding, "I'd be delighted to give a private dance to a woman, as well." Kristin looked at Mindy for a second and then burst out laughing, almost shooting orange juice out her nose. I told Mindy that if she could get me Obara's photo, I'd pay for four private dances and she could just sit there and paint her nails. Her eyes lit up.

Kristin noticed that Mindy had a diamond-studded Rolex on her wrist. Mindy explained that a customer had given it to her.

"You would not believe this asshole who gave it to me. He thinks because he gave me a fancy little watch that he owns this sweet little ass. He could not be more wrong."

Mindy had already been drinking for some time before we'd come, and I think the part of her brain playing gatekeeper to her mouth had long since shut down. Maybe it was because Kristin was there, but for whatever reason, she went into a monologue about hostess/strippers and how they viewed their customers. It wasn't positive.

After Seventh Heaven, Kristin and I made our way to the Sports Café. Black Jack, a Nigerian bodyguard, was at the door. He and

Lucie had been buddies, and every time I passed him he would ask if there was any news. He knew I was a reporter, but he kept his mouth shut. Black Jack gave me some discount tickets for the Private Eyes club. Kristin's friend Dorcy joined us, and we all went in and had drinks.

Dorcy went and hung out in the girls' restroom, which was like Grand Central Station in the club—everyone passed through it. A few girls were snorting coke in the stalls. Dorcy chatted up Jesse, an Australian girl covered in tattoos who had seen two different photos of Obara that were being carried around by the police. She knew Lucie's ex-boyfriend, Nick, and told her where to find him.

He was on the corner near a bookstore (long since out of business) handing out flyers for a "nightclub" where they sold ecstasy behind the counter. I asked him when was the last time he'd seen Lucie.

In a thick Australian accent, he said to me, "You must be a reporter. If you want to know about Lucie, let's see some cash."

I gave him 5,000 yen. I showed him the sketch of Obara. It didn't ring a bell. I told him I'd pay for a photo of Obara and walked away.

I headed back toward Seventh Heaven. Layla, a Swedish student who was studying Japanese at Sophia University, was handing out flyers for the club. I'd run into her at a Sophia alumni function, and thus she also knew I was a reporter. At about five feet eleven with long platinum blond hair, she stood out. She wasn't working as a stripper but was waitressing and also sometimes pulling in customers. She handed me a list of the clubs the police had visited that day. She spoke Japanese and she paid attention to what the other girls were saying, so she had proven to be a useful source.

I thanked her for the list, and she motioned me to follow her into a little coffeeshop nearby.

"Jake," she said, "a lot of people have figured out you're a reporter now—you should be careful. People know your face. I think it's so cool what you do. I want to be a police reporter too. Do you think you can get me into the *Yomiuri?"*

“If you keep studying Japanese as hard you are doing, I might be able to help. Get you in? I’m just a plebe, a lowly soldier. I don’t have any pull.”

“Oh, that’s okay. Anyway, this is all so exciting. By the way, is there really a Chinese mafia in Japan? The Snakeheads, I think.”

“You should ask Yamamoto, my boss. He knows that stuff.”

“The three of us should go out for drinks, then. By the way, have you been to Club Codex yet? One of the victims worked there, I hear.”

I assured her that to the best of my knowledge one of them had indeed worked there in the past. She gave me one more name, Melissa. Melissa had been working at the club with Lucie. Layla had spoken to her at length, and she told me what she’d heard.

According to Layla, Melissa had seen Lucie and a long-haired Japanese man talking at the Casablanca club a week before Lucie had vanished. The man had looked very rich. He’d ordered expensive brandy and champagne. He’d spoken to Lucie for almost three hours, in a very friendly fashion. He’d paid in cash.

He hated being talked to in Japanese and would make a horrible face if you did. He preferred to speak English.

Melissa had been questioned by the police several times about the customer and his interaction with Lucie. Melissa wasn’t working in Roppongi anymore; she didn’t have the proper visa, and now that the police had interviewed her, she was afraid she’d be deported if she wasn’t careful.

I thanked Layla profusely. Now I knew what the cops knew. Lucie and Obara had met each other, and there were witnesses to prove it. He wasn’t going to be able to deny that. I called Yamamoto and passed on the information. He thanked me. I thanked him for thanking me and hung up the phone. What I’d given him was enough for a big scoop on the story. I’d delivered: it was a scoop for us when we reported it. It helped justify the huge amount of cash I’d blown in Roppongi. The article pissed off the TMPD, which had

wanted to spring a surprise on Obara. (The other newspapers reported it roughly a week later.)

I got in at three in the morning. Beni was crying her head off. Sunao looked completely exhausted, holding Beni, walking around trying to soothe her. I took Beni off her hands and carried the little runt in my arms while gently walking on the step machine. I put U2's greatest hits on the boom box, low volume, and moved gently until Beni started to yawn and close her eyes. She was still completely hairless, and her eyes were so swollen that you could see only her black pupils. She looked like an alien baby from an episode *of The X-Files*, but it didn't bother me. She was my own flesh and blood, even if she was an alien. She reminded me of Alien Cop, come to think of it.

As I held her in the middle of the night, I had a little time to reflect on things. I thought of Tim and Jane Blackman. They must have memories like that of Lucie.

I thought of Obara, and it made me feel sick to my stomach. I realized that having my own child was making me feel personal about this story. For a reporter, that is not necessarily a good thing. If stories become personal, they start to tear you up.

The last thing I did after laying Beni down on the futon next to Sunao was to call Dai Davies, a private investigator hired by the Black-mans to look into Lucie's disappearance. He told me that the police had asked Mr. Blackman for a sample of Lucie's handwriting. Obviously, they were now trying to determine who had written them a false note, trying to throw them off the scent. I suppose they had to be certain that it wasn't Lucie's signature, even though Tim had already told them as much.

The investigation seemed to be proceeding smoothly. Obara was arrested and rearrested on multiple charges, including the 1992 manslaughter of an Australian girl, Carita Ridgway, and several cases of rape. In Carita's case, he had used chloroform to knock her out and then filmed himself raping her. She'd died of liver failure. Her parents had been told it was food poisoning. It's doubtful that

an autopsy was performed—they rarely are, even for Japanese people who die under suspicious circumstances.

The police searched the apartment building where Obara took women and the surrounding Miura area but didn't find a body. At least not the first time.

Also, Obara would not confess to killing Lucie. The police response was to rearrest him on other sexual assault charges. They figured they'd break him eventually. They didn't.

Around 6 P.M. on November 10, Obara's lawyer sent out a statement to the mass media. Obara named the victims in the document, thus slandering them at the same time as repeating the same line he'd given the police. He did admit in the letter that he'd at least met Lucie, clearly an attempt to make sure that the letter was taken up by the mass media. It was the work of a totally unrepentant sociopath, according to one profiler I spoke with.

It began like this:

> Right now I am being accused of a crime, because in the past, I paid for sex with foreign women at foreign pubs and hostess clubs and engaged in compensated dating with Japanese women who performed prostitution services as professionals or at a professional level. I paid a fair price for this sex play (which I refer to as subjugation play).
>
> Because I paid the equivalent price for services rendered, and had the permission of these women when we engaged in sexual play, I do not believe [I have committed] rape or sexual assault.

He then went on to name each of his accusers by her initials, accusing them of being prostitutes, heroin addicts, and liars. The only interesting note was the one concerning the name TM: Obara claimed that he had been shielding her from the pursuit of Issei Sagawa and had never even had paid sex with her.

In 1981, while studying abroad, Issei Sagawa had shot and killed a Dutch girl, committed necrophilia, and then eaten parts of her body. He had been declared insane by the French courts, released to

Japan, and never served a day in prison. It wasn't surprising to see him linked with Obara.

Obara also tried to clear up some questions that had everyone puzzled. One of them involved the frozen carcass of his pet dog being found in a meat locker he owned.

> I believe when cloning technology progresses enough, that I will be able to revive my dog, whom I love so much. Therefore, I placed him in the freezer along with roses and the food he loved so much, just as he was. The police have photos. The morning television programs have been reporting that he was in pieces, and that is a total lie.

He went on to explain why he possessed large amounts of human growth serum.

He also insisted that he was using sleeping pills only to access his unconscious and fully develop his potentialities to the max. He also used them to cure his insomnia but never used them for sex play.

He had been using cement to fix the tiles in the apartment building.

Point by point, he denied the reports about him. He denied knowing Akira Takagi. He denied reports of dressing in women's clothing and having been arrested for Peeping Tom activity.

He threatened to sue the media for their misleading stories and file criminal complaints for slander. Finally, he notified us that the police were planning a large-scale search of the places where he had been living, noting that mobile police forces and helicopters would be used, all to take place within seven days.

The chief detective on the case was furious about the statement. He wanted to strangle Obara's lawyer. On that day, at the Azabu police station, he let everyone know just how pissed off he really was.

"I warned that lawyer a thousand times that if he writes about the victims, it'll be criminal slander, and he did it anyway. What the hell is this lawyer guy thinking? We're not supposed to be stopping in the middle of a critical interrogation to give him time to meet

with the client for this crap. If this is made public and the victims make a criminal complaint, I'd love to arrest this lawyer as an accomplice for criminal slander. I'd do it. With this letter and with all the crap that's been in the press, it's pretty damn easy to figure out who the victims are. It's a whole different level from the mistaken, off-centered stuff the press is writing. It's slander.

"This giant search of the area he's talking about. Crap.

"Does he use the phrase 'subjugation play' in the interrogation? I have no damn idea.

"It's true that some of the victims received money, but that has nothing to do with the crime. They hadn't agreed in advance; when the victims awoke after he'd finished with them, he'd give them money to try to buy their silence. The victims, they'd lost consciousness, so they don't remember anything.

"They'd wake up and know that something was funny, wrong, and Obara would go into his usual song and dance. 'Oh, you got so sick.' He'd give them cab fare to get home.

"Even if he gave them money, the facts don't change. He tricked those women, made them drink alcohol laced with drugs. It's attempted murder. I want to get this bastard on charges of attempted murder.

"If you really read this letter, you'll see that it's nothing but convenient information for him. It doesn't touch on the videos at all. Not one line.

"And the tile explanation? Bullshit. Everyone knows that to fix a tile you don't need to use cement; any strong glue will do the trick."

If Obara's motive was to shake up and infuriate the police, he'd succeeded with that letter beyond his wildest dreams. He was taunting the cops and ridiculing the victims. The man knew no shame.

On February 9, based on a new “tip,” the TMPD sent nearly a hundred officers back to the beach in Miura where they had searched for Lucie’s body almost four months previously. The explanation was that after analyzing the distance on the speedometer of a car rented by Obara shortly after Lucie vanished, they had made a determination of where he’d likely buried the body. One veteran police reporter from the *Mainichi* said he believed that the police had found Lucie’s body on the first run and were waiting for Obara to substantiate their find before officially announcing it, just to make sure the case was solid and waterproof. It’s possible.

I was awakened at five in the morning on that day and told to go to the City News Department and be on hand to talk to any foreigners involved in the story as soon as the body was found.

I was hoping that the TMPD would already have notified Tim, but I knew they wouldn’t. The cops didn’t like him because he had been critical of their methods, which he had every right to be.

The whole squad was grouchy and angry and tired. Accusations of incompetence and criticism, real or perceived, were not being taken well. The two factions were clearly at odds with each other. Tim was kept out of the picture, as much as possible.

Instead, the police had brought Jane Blackman to Japan a week before the search. They’d hidden her in a hotel room away from the press and wouldn’t even let her take a call from another family member. She’d been accompanied by victim support officers from Scotland Yard. The Japanese police had quizzed her about Lucie in detail: What special physical features did she have, what illnesses had she had, what did she normally eat, what were her habits? Mrs. Blackman knew that something was about to break, but the police were giving nothing away. Tim was in the dark.

It didn’t take the police long to find the body this time, hidden in a makeshift wall in a cave along the oceanfront. Supposedly, the smell of decomposed flesh was so strong that a few of the younger cops became physically ill. They found Lucie’s head encased in

concrete. Identification couldn't be done that day, but everyone knew who it was. Googly called me from the scene and let me know what was going on. He knew that I was talking to Tim. I guess he wanted Tim to know.

In the end, it wasn't hard to break the news. Well, not as hard as I thought. When Tim Blackman answered the phone, he already knew why I was calling and what I had to say.

"Tim, this is Jake at the *Yomiuri."*

"Yes, Jake."

"I don't know any way to break this to you gently, so I won't. It's just as you feared it would be. The police found her body this morning."

There was a long silence.

"Buried?"

"The body was partially dismembered; it looks like she's been dead for several months, judging by the decomposition. The identification is not official, but all indications are that it's her. I'm very sorry for your loss. Is there anything else you'd like to know?"

"No, Jake. Thank you very much for calling. It's good to know what really happened." You could barely detect a waver in his well-chosen words, a murmur of something else. I was ready to hang up, and then he spoke again.

"Yes, I have one question. Where did they find the body?"

"Near his place. Hidden in a cave along the beach."

There was another long silence.

"Are you all right, Tim?"

"Oh, yes, it all comes as, well, not a shock, but it … it is … not what I'd hoped for. Didn't they search the beach before?"

"They did, Tim. I don't know why they didn't find her then, but they didn't. Do you have anything you want to say to the press, to the police?"

“I’m very happy that the police found Lucie. We’ll have to come to Japan and pick up the remains to give her a proper burial once everything’s confirmed.”

“Understood. Tim, I wish I could say something to make it less painful for you. All I can do is keep you up to date on what comes next in the investigation.”

“Yeees,” said Tim, drawing out the word almost dreamily. “Yes, please do. You’ve been very good to keep us abreast of all the events in the investigation up to now, much more than the Japanese police, in fact. Thank you.”

“Well, I’ll talk to you later.”

“Yes, yes. Thank you for calling me.”

“You’ll be getting a lot of calls from the other media about this, quite soon I would imagine.”

“Yes, thanks for the warning. I may turn the phone off for a bit. Good night.”

“Good night, Tim.”

Several hours later, I had to call Tim back. The *Yomiuri* wanted an official comment. This is the life of a reporter. I didn’t feel like intruding on his personal grief any more than I already had, but the job is the job.

Tim had prepared a comment by then.

“In my heart of hearts, I’d like to think that Lucie was still alive, but I have to face the reality that this might not be the case. If I stop and think about all the circumstances involved, I can’t deny the strong possibility that the body in question is, in fact, my daughter Lucie. In a ghastly way, I’m kind of relieved. Not knowing whether she is alive or has been killed … is the hardest thing of all. I only hope that there are no more bodies.”

Lucie was positively identified on the tenth. In early April, Obara was officially charged with raping her, causing her death, and then

mutilating the body and abandoning it in the cave. In his first trial he was found not guilty of the charges involving Lucie. Sometimes Japanese courts simply baffled me. On the other hand, he received life imprisonment for eight rapes and other charges. The case is in appeal, where it will probably be for years and years to come.[4*]

A lot of people in Japan would like to shrug off the Lucie Blackman case as just some sort of freak crime in one of the world's safest countries. Although it was an unusual crime, it raises questions. The biggest question for me was always this: how did this man get away with allegedly raping woman after woman for more than a decade, and why didn't the police catch him sooner?

It's not that the police have a bad attitude toward crimes against foreign women—it's all women. They still don't seem to anticipate how stalking behavior such as the kind demonstrated by Obara can lead to serious injury and even death.

I think—and since I'm not writing for the newspaper, I can actually express my opinion here—that sexual assault against women was always a low-priority crime for the police. The penalty for rape is so negligible (usually two years maximum) and the possibility of a suspended sentence for a first offender so great that it hardly seems like a felony at all.

Hostesses aren't seen as victims by many of the police; they're seen as victimizers, greedy, manipulative prostitutes. Especially the foreign hostesses. I don't know how you can change that frame of mind. Even if the victim is a prostitute, she's still a victim. Prostitutes are entitled to say no. Women who are drugged against their will can't say anything at all.

In the last five years, the TMPD has started putting female officers in charge of investigating sexual assault; it's a good start. Male officers have tended to treat the victims like criminals in the past, asking questions such as, "How did you egg him on?" or "Why didn't you say no?" I've talked to three women who have had very unpleasant experiences with the police after being raped. Each of

them was made to wait between three and eight hours before being taken to a hospital for examination. During that time, all of them were allowed or encouraged to go to the bathroom, thus, of course, destroying the physical evidence.

Rape kits are not a standard item at police stations, and very few officers know how to use them, though I've been told that rape kits themselves do exist. In a country where rape is not considered a serious crime, it's not surprising that people like Obara flourish.

A source in the British Embassy told me that there had been complaints filed with the police about Obara many years before Lucie vanished. I don't know if that's true; I can't find anyone in the TMPD who will confirm that officially. I know this much: if someone had taken those complaints seriously, not only would Obara have gone to jail long since but Lucie Blackman would still be alive.

1* For each drink the customer orders for himself and the woman, a portion of the money is kicked back to the hostess. This is why customers who order expensive bottles of brandy, champagne, and other spirits are much beloved by the hostess community.

2* In December 2008, Obara was convicted of eight rapes and one count of rape resulting in death.

3* Outline was raided by the Azabu police in the fall of 2006. One of the girls working there who'd known Lucie was arrested, deported back to Australia, and forbidden to return to Japan for five years.

4* In the most recent ruling, in December 2008, Obara was found guilty of dismembering and abandoning Lucie's body but not her manslaughter or rape.

ATMs and Jackhammers: A Day in the Life of a Shakaibu Reporter

I awoke in the sleeping quarters on the third floor of the Yomiuri Building, tired and sweaty. I'd had to stay at the office so late the night before that I'd missed the last train home.

There were two sleeping quarters on the third floor: one for the political beat and economic beat, the other for the national news and delivery. Our quarters had lumpy mattresses, bean-filled pillows, and a heating system that made you feel as if you were sleeping in a sauna. Other features: an EXIT sign that cast a flickering light over everything and a phone next to the bed that you were expected to answer at all times. Of course, the political beat had a room that was dark and temperature-controlled, with new beds and no phone.

I shaved, hopped into the company car, and headed off to Saitama, my old beat. I was working on a piece about a string of spectacular ATM robberies. There had been about fifty-seven in the last year. It works like this: The ATM robbers break into a construction site or a construction company near a lonely ATM in the suburbs. They steal a power shovel; if a forklift is available, it'll do (and it's easier to heist one than you might think). They go to the ATM, rip the entire machine out of the ground, and take off with it. In a more secluded location they whack open the ATM, remove the safe, transfer it to another car, and split. The crime usually takes about four minutes, and the average police response time to an alarm is about six minutes, so the robbers have to be pretty fast. About half the time they can't get the safe out fast enough and they have to leave the dough behind.

I talked to Scotland Yard, which had been called in to investigate a series of similar incidents in the late 1990s (it was known as ram raiding). The police in Britain had urged the banks to bolt their ATMs to the ground or floor, and that had virtually eliminated the problem. It can't stop a power shovel, but it adds a couple minutes to the demolition time, making it easier for the cops to catch the thieves. The other solution was to insert ink packs into the machines; whenever a machine was shaken or knocked over, ink would spurt onto the bills, thus marking them. In Japan, however, the banks have insured all their ATMs so that they don't lose a yen if they get robbed, and they'd rather pay the insurance than go to the expense of reinforcing their machines. As regards the ink pack option, it was vetoed by the Bank of Japan, which didn't want to have to exchange clean bills for inked-up ones. So the cops are stuck with the mess.

My first stop was the Saitama police headquarters to ask questions about the seven ATM robberies in the area. The people I had pestered ten years before, including some of my good sources, had risen up the ladder, which would make it easy to get answers. In a way, they still knew about me because I'd been sending New Year's cards to them since I'd left. In Japan, you send New Year's cards every year. It's a ritual. If you don't, you're considered an outcast. Personally, they drive me crazy, but I dutifully sent those cards out every December, so that the guys would know where I was, what I was doing, and how old Beni was.

The minute I walked onto the seventh floor, I ran into the former head of the railroad police—"Jake, thanks for the New Year's card. Your son is really cute." I chose not to point out that the cute little thing was a daughter. Then people passing by stopped in their tracks to say, hey, hello, long time. It was like having a mini–fan club for a couple minutes. I then headed over to see Chiba, who used to head the Organized Crime Task Force and was now the head of the Vice and Crime Prevention Bureau. This means he actually had an office to himself, complete with a big desk, two sofas, and a marble table with a crystal ashtray and a crystal lighter. Plus he

could smoke *in* the building. That was about as good as it got in the Saitama Police Department.

Chiba gave me a warm welcome. The ATM robberies, he said, were helped by the fact that most construction equipment in Japan is designed to run with a generic key. This enables anyone at a construction site to use any machine on the lot without having to search around for a key. Even machines made by different manufacturers can be run with the same key. This means that anyone with the key can walk onto a lot and steal a machine. No one wants to go to the expense of changing the locks on machines. Plus, the machines are rarely stolen by the criminals; they are just borrowed and then left behind.

Chiba and I then walked across the hall to pick up Yoshimura, who was now the head of the Theft and Stolen Property Division. His second in command, Kohata, used to be vice police chief of Omiya police station. I knew all three of them. We went out for eel over rice and shot the breeze. They asked about my family, and when I showed them pictures of my daughter and wife, they gawked. Sunao is considered quite beautiful by contemporary Japanese standards; they couldn't believe she'd have anything to do with me. Then there was the usual fight about who would pay the bill. I was hoping to pay so that I would be one up on the you-owe-me-I-owe-you scale that is important in dealing with older Japanese, who still have a sense of honor. However, I had to concede because Chiba had already handed cash to the proprietor before we ate.

Kohata, who looks like John Malkovich but with more hair, filled me in on the latest trends in both ATM robberies and housebreaking. Recently, Japan had had a huge surge in break-ins by Chinese nationals, some of whom, it turns out, are adept at picking locks. Japanese locks are pretty easy to pick. But after a wave of these thefts, people installed stronger locks, so now the crooks walk around carrying power drills, corkscrews (which are effective in turning the lock), and cute little stickers of happy faces, Hello Kitty and the like. Why stickers? They're used to cover up the

drilled hole in the lock so that while the thief is inside pilfering the place, nobody walking by will notice anything amiss.

I traveled to Yoshikawa, in east Saitama, to check out the latest scene of an ATM robbery, near a Home Depot–like store. I tried finding a witness, but everyone just slammed the door in my face and told me they didn't need a paper. It was very déjà vu. One lady complained that the *Yomuiri* wasn't giving her movie tickets when she renewed her subscription and she was tired of getting detergent. I couldn't get in a word. Some things never change.

It was pretty easy to see why this ATM had gotten knocked over. It was plopped down like a little shed in a corner of the parking lot, next to a bus stop, very visible from the road, with absolutely nothing to obstruct an oncoming power shovel. A cursory look at the remains revealed that the machine had been bolted down in three places with thin sheets of metal. The crooks had made off with 6 million yen (about $60,000 at the time).

I finally found an eyewitness across the road, little Mrs. Ishikawa, who opened the door only after I showed her my business card, my photo ID, and an article about me in a *Yomiuri* brochure. Her story went like this:

"I heard a big noise that sounded like *gon gon gon*, and I thought it might be an earthquake or something. I could feel the ground shake. But then I remembered that construction had been going on down the road and thought maybe they were just starting very, very early today. But then I heard this *gan gan* sound, and my husband got up to look out the window, and I looked out too, and we could see these two men working a big power shovel, ripping the ATM out of the ground and smashing it into little pieces. My husband called the police. Of course, by the time the police came, there was only a big pile of rubble and the men had driven the safe off in a white station wagon and were nowhere to be seen.

"I was a little surprised, but my husband, who reads the newspaper every day—although we don't take the *Yomiuri*, sorry—had read about those ATM robberies. As a matter of fact, he said to

me just last week, ‘I think it’s just a matter of time before they get that machine across the street.’ And what do you know, they did! I think the criminals were very smart or very lucky because everyone in the neighborhood thought it was just more construction work and we were all a little slow to call the police.”

Local color, quotable, good.

The police chief of the city of Yoshikawa was someone I knew well; he used to be the second in command of the Saitama Homicide Division. After we greeted each other, he expressed great embarrassment about the robbery happening on his turf. Police had marked fifteen sites as potential ATM robberies, but the one that had gotten hit wasn’t even on the list. As a matter of fact, police had been staking out another site when this robbery occurred. The Yoshikawa Police Department is responsible for 30 square miles that comprise two cities and a town, so it isn’t surprising that with its limited manpower the crooks had gotten away, but still he didn’t feel good about it.

• • •

Having done my job, I figured that since I was in Saitama I shouldn’t waste the chance to visit Sekiguchi-san and his family. I called to warn him I’d be coming, then gave directions to the driver, and off we went to northernmost Saitama. It’s so remote there that occasionally the local schools had a problem with wild boar running loose in the schoolyard. It’d been ten years since I was a young reporter in Saitama, but Sekiguchi was still my mentor and his family treated me like one of their own. It would be good to see them.

We pulled up to the house about seven in the evening, and it was sort of like old times again. Everyone greeted me warmly. Sekiguchi-san and Mrs. Sekiguchi looked great, but the two daughters sure had changed. They were no longer little elementary school girls.

Despite having recently being diagnosed with cancer, Sekiguchi was in good spirits, going on about the pleasure of being back doing real detective work as his wife laid out well-remembered junk food for me. Yuki-chan had a giant Hello Kitty pillow that she and her sister wanted me to give Beni. We laughed and nibbled and talked some shop, Sekiguchi relating the details of his latest case, which prosecutors had removed him from. The investigation had been halted for political reasons, having to do with the governor. Some things never change.

Sekiguchi and I didn't smoke that night. He was trying to quit.

I got back to Tokyo at 10:30 and went straight to Edogawa Ward, where I was scheduled to meet a North Korean Japanese who was president of an industrial waste management company.

The Japanese colonized Korea during their warlike days, and after the war a lot of the Koreans who had been brought over as slave labor remained in Japan. They later split into two groups: those pledging allegiance to South Korea and those pledging allegiance to North Korea. The North Korean Japanese have their own school system and a kind of local government board. This guy used to be part of that local government.

As you can imagine, with North Korea admitting that twenty years ago it had abducted Japanese citizens—one simply walking along a beach—and spirited them away to North Korea to teach the Japanese language to spies and never let them leave, North Korean Japanese were and always will be tense. This guy had agreed to meet me to talk about the situation of North Koreans in Japan and their support for the North Korean government.

During a period when many Koreans had returned to North Korea to help rebuild the country, his elder sister had gone to join the effort. By the time she and everyone else figured out that the "workers' paradise" was really a hell on Earth, there was no way to get his sister home and he was forced more or less to pay a

“ransom” in terms of support for North Korea. That was not uncommon, he said.

As he was going on about North Korean government activities in Japan, our conversation was interrupted by a tough-looking young guy who immediately engaged the company president in a loud, heated discussion in Korean. I recognized him as a young executive-class yakuza in the Yamaguchi-gumi Yamaken group. I’d seen his face in a yakuza fan magazine. There were several available at the time; and any good police reporter covering organized crime made sure to read them regularly. Of course, I didn’t understand a word the two were saying, but later they didn’t mind explaining that it was about a botched murder attempt the previous week.

Two punks in motorcycle helmets had burst into a bar and fired guns at the former Sumiyoshi-kai syndicate boss. The punks were crappy shots; five people were killed, three of them innocent bystanders; the former boss wasn’t touched. This mishap spurred the police into cracking down hard on the Sumiyoshi-kai. The yakuza hadn’t been successful in giving the police anything to make them lay off. They offered up a fall guy, but it didn’t look as if he was the killer.

The young executive gave me the name of the guy who was really responsible for the killings. I wasn’t there to get information about that story, but I passed what I’d learned on to our local bureau and a cop I used to know well.

Around eleven, I met the corporate blood brother, or kigyoshatei, of a Kokusui-kai faction at a bar and pumped him for info on the ATM robberies. I paid for the drinks and handed him front-row tickets to a prizefight.

I got home past midnight. Sunao and Beni were asleep. I washed the dishes in the sink, took a shower, and went to sleep on my own futon, finally.

Evening Flowers

The Japanese have words for sadness that are so subtle and complicated that the English translations don't do them justice.

Setsunai is usually translated as "sad," but it is better described as a feeling of sadness and loneliness so powerful that it feels as if your chest is constricted, as if you can't breathe; a sadness that is physical and tangible. There is another word, too—*yarusenai*, which is grief or loneliness so strong that you can't get rid of it, you can't clear it away.

There are some things like that. You get older and you forget about them, but every time you remember, you feel that yarusenai. It never goes away; it just gets tucked away and forgotten for a while.

There is a beautiful children's song, written by the artist Takehisa Yumeji, called "The Evening Primrose." The evening primrose is a yellow, sometimes white flower that blooms only at night, then tinges with red in the morning and withers. The song is almost impossible to translate because it says more in what it does not say than in what it does. Any translation would be an interpretation. But here's mine.

You live and wait and wait and wait
But the other may never come
Like waiting on the evening primrose
This feeling of sadness without end
This evening, it does not seem
That even the moon will come out

Every now and then, you meet someone who nurtures you as a person or, in my case, as a reporter. I suppose that I always come

across as a stray dog that people feel a need to take in, to nurture. Mami Hamaya took me under her wing when I first got to the shakaibu. She had been a police reporter as well. When I started on the Fourth District beat, she was the only one to actually give me some useful contacts. I don't know why we hit it off, perhaps because we were both minorities within the department. From early 2000, we spent a lot of time working together. I thought of her as an older sister of sorts.

Hamaya looked a lot like Velma, the girl with the thick-rimmed, thick-lensed glasses on the old cartoon *Scooby-Doo*. She had her hair in a Beatles cut and had a button nose. She would usually forgo a skirt, wearing only slacks and a collared shirt to work, dressed a little like a guy. She was tough and hardworking, as is every woman in the National News Department. There is a macho vibe to the whole department, and women are few in number. In 2003, there were six or seven females out of a hundred reporters in the department. To survive in the shakaibu women have to put up with the same lousy hours as the men, they're expected to pour the drinks for their male counterparts on social occasions, and they can never complain. In many ways, they have to work harder than the men.

One particular phone call sealed our friendship.

I was at work on the day shift, which basically involved sitting around the newsroom answering the phone and waiting to dispatch people and orchestrate panic when and if something happened. For about nine hours. At that point in time, I was a member of the yu-gun (reserve corps), an elite special forces unit of the National News Department that mobilized for breaking stories and had the freedom to run around writing about anything interesting during a slow news period. I was also responsible for working on the feature "Safety Meltdown," a long-running series about how crime rates were rising in Japan, why, and what it meant for the country. Even though crime rates were still ridiculously low, the police clearance rate (ability to solve a crime) in several categories of felony had hit an all-time low. It was a hot topic.

The day was flat and quiet, and nothing of any particular importance was on the horizon. Then the phone rang, with an irate Yomiuri Giants fan on the other end. He didn't like the current coach. I told him that we were the news department of the paper and that we were neither the sports department nor the managers of the Yomiuri Giants. I suggested he call elsewhere.

He gave me his name and then demanded I give him mine. I did—sounding it out in Japanese style.

"Jei-ku A-de-ru-su-te-in."

The caller was not pleased.

"Is this some kind of trick? Who the hell are you?"

He demanded my name several times.

"I'm a reporter for the *Yomiuri*. I'm also a foreigner."

"You're not a foreigner. You're some kind of machine, designed to trick people and make them hang up."

"I assure you that I'm not a machine. I'm a human being; a non-Japanese human being."

"A foreigner, huh. No wonder you don't get what I'm saying. Put someone else on."

The only other person nearby was Hamaya. She nodded her head and asked me to give her the phone.

"Hello, this is Hamaya. I believe that Jake already answered your question."

The caller was now fuming.

"First a gaijin and then a woman? Put a man on the phone."

"I'm sorry," said Hamaya in a sticky-sweet voice, "the only people working today are either foreigners or women. Or foreign women. I guess we can't help you."

Then she hung up on him.

I liked Hamaya.

Whenever I submitted a feature, an article that I'd put together on my own, Hamaya would look it over for me and make suggestions. The formulas for standard news articles and in-depth analyses were quite different, and I had a tough time wrapping my head around feature articles that departed from the standard reverse-pyramid format.

She had a black sense of humor and a nice, gentle way of poking fun at me, especially my atrocious table manners. She was not particularly pretty, but she was one of those women who mysteriously become more attractive the longer you know them.

Hamaya and I were both assigned to the information technology coverage crew. Japan was in the middle of an IT bubble, and "Internet," "hacking," and "computer virus" were the big buzzwords. The IT crew was assembled from a cross section of the newspaper, including science, economy, culture, and business reporters. I was assigned to cover the underbelly of IT: viruses, hackers, DOS attacks, Internet fraud, illegal sales over the Net, child pornography, yakuza incursions into the industry, the misuse of prepaid telephones, and anything else remotely unpleasant that was connected to the latest technological advances in Japan and the world.

I was a self-taught computer geek. I started on a Mac but made the switch to Windows and spent a brief period of my life obsessed with first-person shooting games. I learned how computers worked so that I could squeeze as much juice out of my rig to play games such as Blood and Thief at a higher resolution. My motives were wrong, but my results were good.

Hamaya was assigned to the section after me. She could barely use e-mail, and I suddenly found myself in the position of teaching my teacher. Hamaya was a good student, and I never felt uncomfortable with our temporary role reversal. I loaned her books, explained terms to her, showed her how to work the various Net browsers and make bookmarks. In turn, she'd read my features,

make suggestions, and point out my grammatical mistakes. I could also count on her to cover my ass when I needed it.

When I got news that Beni was about to be born on September 17, 2000, Hamaya kicked me out of the office and took over my half-finished article before I could even ask her to do it.

I was allowed to take two days off for the birth. A week later, one of the IT coverage crew reporters needed a photo of a baby for an article on cloning. Hamaya immediately volunteered my child.

"Jake, it'll be an auspicious start for the kid. Besides, I want to see the little bugger. We'll all go."

So we got in a taxi with a *Yomiuri* photographer and made a run to Saitama Prefecture, where Sunao was staying with her mother. Hamaya was very good with the child. When Sunao let her hold Beni, I saw her smile as I'd never seen her smile before. She glowed.

Hamaya had sacrificed a lot for the job. Most of the women in our department had. She'd missed chances to get married and was past the age where she could have a child safely—assuming she could ever find enough free time to date someone.

The photographer snapped the photo while Beni cried away, and the next day Beni, as part of a montage, was on the front cover of the *Yomiuri* next to a headline that read: "Cloning: Are We Going to Create a Superhuman Race?"

Hamaya put a total of twenty-eight copies of the edition on top of my desk the next day, separated into four bundles, neatly held together with plastic string. It was a great memento and a keepsake.

One of the problems with Japanese newspapers, and maybe Japanese companies and the government as well, is that you are never allowed to do the same job for very long. There are constant personnel changes, just for the sake of change, which hurts job continuity and makes it very difficult for a reporter to have his or her own specialized field of knowledge. The lack of a byline on most

stories also hurts a reporter trying to get recognition as an expert on a certain subject matter.

Hamaya's field of expertise was the mentally disabled, especially involving the appropriate measures to be taken with them when they broke the law. She was also an enthusiastic advocate for the handicapped, an area where Japan is still decades behind the United States in terms of social intergration.

The law and how it should deal with the mentally ill was being discussed heatedly in the late 1990s. Some people loudly asserted that officers of the law should have stronger authority to forcibly incarcerate mental patients.

What sparked the debate occurred on July 23, 1999. A Japan Airlines plane leaving from Haneda (Tokyo International Airport) was hijacked by a mentally ill individual. He stabbed the captain of the airplane during the crime, and upon his arrest a huge debate as to whether his name should be released to the public ensued. Because he had a history of mental illness, and because he had been a patient in a mental hospital, most newspapers did not report his name—as was the custom in these cases. However, on the twenty-seventh, *The Sankei Shinbun*, the most conservative of the daily newspapers, began referring to him by name.

The prosecutor's office did not submit the man to a formal mental competency evaluation before prosecuting him, implying that it believed he was mentally capable of being held criminally responsible. By August 10, even Nihon Television, the *Yomiuri*'s sister news station, was reporting his real name.

By the time he was formally charged, almost every news agency was using his real name. In fact, his psychological problems and medical history were revealed in great detail by several media outlets.

Hamaya vigorously opposed publishing the man's name and expressed her dissatisfaction at the way the story was being covered.

"You know, we've all developed a mob mentality. All the reporting coming out pretty much implies that if someone is being

treated for a mental illness, they're one step away from committing a horrible crime."

She told me this over lunch in August, and I didn't agree with her, not at first. I still had my police-beat mind; I was thinking like a cop. Punish criminals. Don't rehabilitate them. All mental illnesses are faked by crafty thugs to avoid jail time.

However, when she brought me up to date on his history and the kinds of calls that were flooding into mental health clinics, I began to see her point.

All of us in the Japanese media at the time were taking one case of a mentally ill person performing a horrible crime and extrapolating it to imply that all mentally ill patients were capable of or likely to commit similar crimes. In many ways, the coverage reinforced many old prejudices about the mentally challenged and encouraged discrimination.

However, that wasn't the mood of the public, it certainly wasn't the tone of the newspaper, and Hamaya had too much integrity to back down or change her articles to fall in line with an unstated company policy.

This got her labeled as a troublemaker. A radical. "She's as crazy as the nuts she's defending." That was when things started to get hard for her.

On June 8, 2001, a thirty-seven-year-old male, Mamoru Takuma, charged into the Osaka University of Education Ikeda Elementary School and stabbed twenty-three children, killing eight. Takuma was believed to be mentally ill, but under the course of the investigation it became apparent that it was a premeditated crime committed out of spite and that he had deliberately been faking mental illness in the hope of not being charged. Once again, the incident made people associate mental illness with violent crimes, and Hamaya continued to voice her opinion that our coverage should not support that prejudice and one incident should not be a vehicle to make blanket statements that all mental illness is faked to avoid

punishment. It was a reasonable approach, certainly, but it created unreasonable reactions within the department.

Hamaya's writing on the subject did not go down well with some of the senior editors. Her integrity and passion for her subject were seen as defiance.

On September 12, at a meeting, it was announced that she was being more or less kicked out of the National News Department and assigned to Human Resources. The department chair, Kikuchi, had requested her transfer on August 29. Hamaya was allowed to make her parting greetings, and her voice cracked so badly that she was hard to hear. She almost cried, but she managed to hold herself together.

I don't know what it is about the department that makes people want to stay so much. Maybe it's like a bad marriage: the more years of your life you've invested in the damn thing, the harder it is to get a divorce. You don't want to feel that you wasted your time. Maybe it's the feeling of knowing you are the elite of the news reporters. Maybe it's that the job becomes your identity, your life, and your reason for getting up in the morning. If you take that away from someone, it's going to hurt.

Hamaya and I went out to dinner at an Italian restaurant in Aoyama that night. The department chair had called her a month before and told her that he was going to move her to the *Yomiuri Weekly*, a *Yomiuri*-owned publication. Hamaya told him, "I want to stay in the National News Department. If I leave, there is nobody who can properly handle reporting on the mentally and physically disabled." She said that the boss had not been happy with her reply; he'd regarded it as insubordination.

A few days before the department meeting, he called her to his desk and told her point-blank, "You are leaving the department and being assigned to Human Resources. You either accept this or resign or be fired. You will never work again as a reporter while you are in this company. That's all."

And he dismissed her without another word.

She wasn't given a reason or an explanation. All I knew was that it was as if someone had beaten her up. We were sitting in the restaurant, and after she repeated those words, "You will never work again as a reporter," she totally broke down. She cried so hard I thought she was choking. She put her head on my shoulder, and I let her cry until she couldn't cry anymore.

I think it helped.

"Look," I said in the most comforting voice I could muster, "the department head is a jerk—he won't be around forever. You just have to wait it out. You're a good reporter. You'll write again. It's just a matter of time."

She asked me if I thought that was really true. I didn't, but I lied. I reassured her that it was just a matter of time. I didn't know that things wouldn't change. I strongly suspected they wouldn't, but you want to leave people some hope. Maybe I should have told her what I really thought. Maybe I should have told her to get the hell out of the *Yomiuri* and work for another newspaper where she might be appreciated. I don't know.

It's hard to keep in touch with people at the *Yomiuri*. You may be working at the same company, but when you're on the police beat, you're a stranger to your own department. You live, eat, and sleep in the TMPD headquarters. The head office becomes a distant memory. It was especially hard to see Hamaya because now she wasn't even in my department. But we kept in contact.

The chief editor of the IT coverage section held a lavish dinner party at his apartment, inviting former reporters as well, and we got to sit around and trade gossip and talk shop for a few hours. I took some good photos of Hamaya pretending to punch out various people. We were supposed to go out for dinner and catch up later that week, but I was busy covering a story and had to cancel on her. She seemed a little disappointed. I promised to reschedule a few days later.

I called her but didn't get an answer.

I don’t remember the exact date anymore. I had to copy some materials in the company library, and I stopped by the head office. The department was unusually somber as I passed through. Kikuchi, the department chair and boss, was at his desk with some senior management having a conference in hushed tones. I went into the hall to get some coffee, and another female reporter came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around. She looked excited, as if she had a juicy secret to tell me. She was smiling.

“Hey, how’s it hanging?” I asked her, trying not to burn my tongue on the coffee.

She leaned in and whispered, “Have you heard the news about Hamaya?”

“No. Good news, I hope. Is she coming back to the shakaibu?”

“You really don’t know?”

“I haven’t talked to her since last week. No, I really don’t know. She’s getting married? She’s got a boyfriend? Enlighten me.”

“She killed herself,” she said, almost tittering.

“Right. What, did she commit *seppuku* in the cafeteria?”

“No, she really killed herself.”

“What? How?”

“They say she hanged herself in her apartment. Her parents found the body today. The weekly magazines are already nosing around asking questions. You should be careful.”

I didn’t have a single thing to say. It felt as if I had been sucker-punched in the stomach.

“Are you okay?”

She must have asked me three times before I could answer.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Thanks for telling me.”

“I’m sorry. I thought you knew.”

“I didn’t, but thanks.”

I politely made my exit, and I went to the bathroom and puked.

I wished that a weekly magazine had called me. I would have told them that Hamaya hadn't killed herself, she'd been driven to suicide by one carelessly cruel sentence, "You'll never work as a reporter again." To a serious, dedicated journalist, those words are already a death sentence.

I went to the funeral. It was a miserably hot day. I showed up late and left early. I saw Kikuchi there and although I knew it wasn't his fault, I wanted to slug him. I couldn't look at him. I didn't want to even begin thinking about whether I'd failed her as a friend. I'd been so high on having a good run of scoops that I think I probably only half listened to what she had been saying a few days earlier. Maybe if I had paid attention or called her back sooner, maybe it would have made a difference.

The next day I had lunch in the police headquarters cafeteria with my police-beat partner and gave her a summary of the funeral. She and Hamaya had gotten along well.

She told me, "You know, Hamaya was really good to me when I started in the City News Department. She showed me the ropes, told me the unwritten rules. She was the most enthusiastic, dedicated reporter I know."

I told her it had been the same for me.

"Yeah, and she knew her stuff. Environmental problems, mental health issues, and the problems of the handicapped. The Environmental Agency even sent a telegram expressing their condolences that was read out loud at the funeral.

"That's the one thing I remembered most about the funeral. So many people, all of them influenced, affected, impressed by this woman. She had been a good reporter."

"Well," she said, "the reward for her hard work was getting dumped in the Human Resources Department. It must have been tough."

"Tough?"

“Well, here she is, a good reporter, a great reporter even—and the company strips her of her position and removes her from reporter work. Now when hiring time comes around she has to deal with all these idealistic young women who just got into the department and tell them what a great company the *Yomiuri* is. I was there at one of these pep talks we give to the new recruits before they start working, and some of the girls didn’t even realize Hamaya had once been a reporter. As far as they were concerned, she was just some middle-aged woman in HR.”

The day after the funeral, I checked my company e-mail account, something I rarely did. I had an unopened e-mail from Hamaya.

It was sent about two days before she killed herself. I have never opened it. I’ve never had the courage. I don’t want to know. I think I have a copy backed up on a hard disk somewhere. I’m not going to look for it.

What’s yarusenai?

It’s that one e-mail you never replied to and will never open. It’s the bad advice you gave and the phone call you should have made and everything that came out of it. It’s thinking about the friends that you suspect you might have been able to save.

The Emperor of Loan Sharks

After covering IT crime, I was eager to get back onto the streets, and on August 1, 2003, I showed up at the gates of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department at 9:55 A.M. in my new suit from the Suit Factory. The officer at the gate eyed my ID suspiciously, then waved me through. The press club hadn't changed much. The same clutter, the same earnest, hardworking, tired souls. Only the cast had changed, a little.

Okubo-san—aka Harry Potter, owing to his baby face and round glasses—was stretched out on the couch. He waved hello to me, sat upright, and had one of the junior reporters bring us canned coffee from the vending machine.

"Welcome back, Jake. Good to see you made it here in one piece. No gaijin alarm with the guard?"

I laughed. "Nope, but I wasn't so sure for a second there."

"We were worried too, but we figured nothing would be able to stand in your way," he said, laughing back. "All right, you'll be working with Chuckles here. She covers the Community Safety Bureau, and you'll back her up, plus cover part of the Organized Crime Control Bureau. When she gets back, she'll brief you on what's going on."

"Okay, got it. Where's my desk?"

Harry Potter kind of grimaced. "Real sorry, Jake, there's no desk for you. But you do have the bottom bunk," he said, pointing toward the bed against the wall. "TMPD reorganized with the creation of the Organized Crime Control Bureau, so we definitely need an extra reporter. We just don't have extra space. Please

endure the situation." As a faithful Japanese employee, I had no choice.

• • •

I was glad to have been partnered with Chuckles Masami—real name Murai.

She was a tough reporter and had a good sense of humor, two things that counted. She had a husky voice and a slight lisp, and when she laughed, you could hear her across a baseball field. There was nothing meek about this woman.

We had worked together before, two years ago. I had been sent to Ishikawa Prefecture to write a "fun" feature about harvesting rice on tiny fields along the slope of a mountain. Chuckles was at the local bureau, and when I challenged her to join me on the slopes cutting rice, she took me up on it on her day off. She was much better at it than I was. She also kicked my ass as a reporter.

When she greeted me, she seemed pleased to see me, if a little awkward. Japan, as every two-bit Japanologist will tell you, is a vertical society. In the company hierarchy, I was technically her superior by virtue of my seniority, but in the small world of the TMPD press club, she was top dog. Those distinctions were subtle but important and were compounded by the fact that she was the only woman on the police beat.

As we talked, she'd call me "Jake-san," which indicated respect, but then slip into "Jake-kun," suggesting equality, familiarity, or disdain; it was as if she couldn't make up her mind where I stood in relation to her. On the other hand, I kept addressing her as "Chuckles-chan," an affectionate honorific that others might have thought bold and brazen. Finally I said, "Just call me Jake. Everyone does."

"But if I did, that would be disrespectful."

"Not to me."

"Okay, Jake-san."

“Good. Now please show me around.”

My second day on the job, I worked the night shift. I tried to get a few winks in at two in the morning, but that of course was an impossible dream. Midmorning there was a TMPD press conference to announce a warrant for the arrest of the leader of a loan-sharking operation that stretched efficiently across the country.

Now, this was more like the kind of crime I knew and loved. It was also Chuckles’s story—she’d been following it for months—but as she was out of the office, I tried to pick up what bits of information I could in her stead. Two things struck me: first, that this loan shark, a bigwig in the Yamaguchi-gumi, was on the wanted list on suspicion of violating, curiously, the Investment, Deposit, and Interest Rate Control Law; and, second, that the Community Economic Safety Division was handling the case, not the Organized Crime Control Bureau.

As has been noted, the Yamaguchi-gumi is the largest of the three main yakuza groups in Japan. It is also the most violent and the most active in infiltrating the stock market and high finance. Extreme loyalty is demanded; anyone caught snitching on his boss may be forced to sacrifice an appendage or even be murdered. In terms of expansion and methods, it is like the Wal-Mart of organized crime. It has its own financial division and maintains strong ties with politicians, including former prime ministers.

Susumu Kajiyama was the Emperor of Loan Sharks. He was a master criminal. A corporate blood brother of the Goryo-kai, a subdivision of the Yamaguchi-gumi, Kajiyama had created, beginning in 2000, a network of close to a thousand loan shark outfits across the country.

He had bought up databases of heavily indebted people whose credit was lousy and could no longer get loans from consumer loan companies, and he had devised the now-popular loan shark strategy of attracting customers through personal phone calls and e-mail. He had set up corporations to provide storefronts for customers, handle

the business, and launder the funds. If you walked into one of these stores, you wouldn't think it different from any legitimate consumer loan shop. Attractive women at the reception desk put you at ease. You'd be able to secure a loan no one else would give you—although it might have to be at an elevated interest rate. That is to say, 10 to 1,250 times more than allowed by law.

But once you fell behind in repayments, Kajiyama's collection agency would come knocking with the standard, subtle lines of moneylenders: "Do you want to die?" "You stupid fucker, how about I make your family pay up?" "Do I have to invite myself to your place and beat the money out of you?"

Most of the time, the collectors didn't follow through on their threats. They didn't need to, although they were so persistent—browbeating the debtor, hounding the wife, calling his employer—that they drove more than a few to suicide.

It was obvious to me that Kajiyama was yakuza, but when I asked the TMPD division chief if that was indeed the case, he hemmed and hawed and would not give a clear answer. According to him, after the anti–organized crime laws had gone into effect, most yakuza had stopped printing their yakuza affiliation on their business cards. I know it may seem odd to some, but that made it harder to identify someone as a yakuza.

Whatever he was, Kajiyama was doing very well. He lived in an apartment that rented for 900,000 yen a month (about $9,000). Even though he'd skipped town as the police closed in, the bills were still paid while the apartment stayed empty.

At the same time the press conference was going on, the TMPD was collecting evidence in several of Kajiyama's offices and shops around the country. As far as the investigation went, it was a big leap forward.

When Chuckles returned to the press club, she dispatched me to an office in Shinjuku, where a police raid was taking place. She wanted photos. So off I went.

At the site, I snapped several blurry photos of grim-faced plain-clothes cops—eleven of them—emerging from the building with boxes of documents.

I was in a great position. I was Chuckles's backup and got kudos if I came up with anything good but wasn't responsible if I didn't. Yet those old reflexes started to kick in. Kajiyama interested me. I wanted to know more about the man. He was a smart criminal who'd built an empire; he was the stuff of a television series.

I rang Noya, a retired cop I'd done a big favor for, and proposed an evening out. Noya was a veteran of the Organized Crime Control Bureau, and I figured that even if he didn't have information about Kajiyama at his fingertips, the lure of getting felt up by a beautiful European woman would make him do his homework.

I was not mistaken.

Once the distraction of Lily, the Estonian girl sipping champagne on his lap, was removed, Noya proceeded to fill me in: "Susumu Kajiyama. Career yakuza. Joined in the seventies. Record of twelve arrests. First arrest in Shizuoka Prefecture in March 1974, assault and bodily injury. Didn't serve time—got off with a fifty-thousand-yen fine [a mere $500].

"Next arrest two years later. Extortion—spent a year in jail. From 1979 to 1983, he was in for methamphetamines—using or selling, I forget which. Once he got out, he moved to Tokyo. I'm guessing he was working for the Goto-gumi."

The Goto-gumi. That was really the first time I paid attention to the name. Of course, I had a vague idea what it was, but I didn't realize that it would become a subject of great interest later in life.

"Any connection between Kajiyama and Goto?" I asked.

Noya wasn't sure, but he had his suspicions. "Goto-gumi spearheaded the Yamaguchi-gumi invasion of Tokyo, built the foundations—set up the infrastructure. If Kajiyama was working in Tokyo in 1983, the odds are very good he was a lackey of Goto.

“Anyway, back to Kajiyama’s arrest record. In October 1984, he gets busted for attempted extortion. In 1985, possession or distribution of marijuana. In 1989, assault again. But in 1990, he gets investigated for violations of the investment laws; he’s hit with a fine, about four million yen [$40,000]. In 1992, assault, but only a fine. In 1994, once again he gets arrested for violations of the investment laws; once again it’s just a fine, five million yen [$50,000]. You can see that somewhere along the line, your boy got smart. No more drug dealing and extortion, the pay is too low. Investments and finance—that’s where the big money is.”

“He tells the police that he’s not a yakuza anymore. When we write about him, we have to say ‘former yakuza.’”

“That’s just bullshit. He’s the number two in the Goryo-kai in the Yamaguchi-gumi. Since 1984, he’s been a player. There’s a video of him at a blood brother ceremony in 1985. He’s been arrested twelve times, convicted twelve times. He has his footprints in a slew of other investigations. Former yakuza? Bullshit.”

“Yeah, well, that’s why I’m asking.”

“This is how they do it. As soon as one of their brethren gets busted, they excommunicate him—and they send out a letter announcing it. That’s supposed to keep the cops away from them. Idea is, if the punk acted on his own, the organization isn’t responsible. ‘He was a bad guy, so we got rid of him.’ Legally, it’s smart because the courts have said that yakuza bosses are liable for damages inflicted by their soldiers. No boss wants to be broke.”

“But Kajiyama is part of the Goryo-kai, right?”

“Well, not technically. Last year he was seen coming in and out of the Onai-gumi, the predecessor of the Goryo-kai. He’s the civilian face of the boss; he’s the front guy. He’s charming, and he looks a little like Robert Mitchum.”

“Anything else?”

“Hmm … likes to travel. He’s been to the United States a couple of times. Gambles at the same casinos where Goto had an account. That’s another reason I think he used to work for Goto.”

“Where’s that?”

“Caesars Palace and the Mirage. Maybe both.”

“That’s where Kajiyama gambles?”

“No, that’s where Goto gambles. Kajiyama gambles at the Mirage. He’s like a big shot there. I’m guessing Goto got him set up there.”

“How does he get into the United States?”

“He’s Japanese. You think anyone keeps track? The National Police Agency won’t share its list of yakuza with the United States, so it’s hard for your people to track them.”

“Why won’t they share?”

“Ask some dickhead in the NPA. I don’t know why.”

There was one other person who could give me background on Kajiyama, but I didn’t get around to asking for a few months, and in retrospect I wish I hadn’t.

I did report back to Chuckles what Noya had told me but left out the part about Kajiyama’s trips to Vegas, which, though interesting, didn’t seem to lead anywhere. I did send a note about Kajiyama and some articles to Special Agent Jerry Kawai, the attaché for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) at the U.S. Embassy, though.

(Note: Kawai and Mike Cox, two of the special agents at ICE, initiated an investigation into Kajiyama that resulted in more than half a million dollars of Kajiyama’s money in the United States being seized. They also made sure that the bulk of the seized money was returned to his victims in Japan. Every little bit helped.)

On August 11, the TMPD raided the headquarters of the Goryo-kai in Shizuoka Prefecture.

The *Yomiuri* had gotten advance word of this, and by the time I arrived at work at ten that morning, Chuckles was putting the finishing touches on the article. The problem was that the police hadn’t planned on there being a traffic jam, so the raid got started

way behind schedule. As a result, editors kept calling, screaming for a story that wasn't ready to go. You can't plan for everything.

The raid got rolling around noon. *Yomiuri* reporters from the Shizuoka office were on the scene taking pictures and sending in reports to their editors—all of which was being compiled at the Tokyo office. It was the usual photos of scary-looking yakuza in dark suits stepping to the side while cops in riot gear hovered and expressionless plainclothes cops went into and out of the building, bringing out cardboard boxes that presumably contained documents.

What was amusing about the police raids was that everybody knew about them in advance. The press knew, and so did the yakuza! If they didn't, the police would notify the yakuza that a raid was going to happen. That way everything would go smoothly, and nobody would get hurt. But you can imagine what the likelihood of a raid turning up anything useful would be.

In the evening of the day of the raid, Kajiyama, accompanied by his lawyer, showed up at the police department and turned himself in. He was supposed to have said something to the effect that he "did not want to cause anyone more trouble." Well, good, a yakuza behind bars, but the press still wasn't allowed to refer to Kajiyama as a yakuza, because the police hadn't officially identified him as such.

It was because of lawyers. The Yamaguchi-gumi had a lot of them. And they were always ready to sue on behalf of their big boys. That's another problem with organized crime in Japan—so damn organized, so damn corporate. Allegedly (we'll never know for sure), a couple of cases were quietly settled where the yakuza sued civilian credit-rating firms that had dared to label one of their operations a front company.

The Kajiyama dance went on. The Emperor was released, the police arrested him again, the Emperor was released, the police arrested him on different charges. Each time he confessed to nothing.

The big mystery—the real issue—was, where had all the money gone? A huge chunk of the Emperor's profits had to be going to the Yamaguchi-gumi, but where was he hiding it? It wasn't showing up in any Japanese bank. How was it being laundered? When you considered that there were more than sixty-thousand victims who had paid illegal and exorbitant rates, it was an astronomical amount of money. Police estimated group revenue to be several billion dollars. If you could follow the money, you'd have the case solved.

Chuckles had me check out the front companies of the empire.

I was woken at three in the morning on the twentieth by the number three guy on the homicide beat. The *Asahi* had run an article on Kajiyama's company having two yakuza on the payroll, indicating that it was further evidence of the guy's connection to the yakuza. Well, I said, it's not like this is news. Other people have written about it before, and we didn't pay any attention to it. Tell Chuckles, I told him. She was unreachable, he replied.

So I knocked on some cops' doors before coming to work to try to confirm the story. As usual, I got a hello, a tip of the head, and nothing else.

When I arrived at the office, Harry Potter pointed out that the Sunday *Mainichi* had run an article about the female leader of a Buddhist group saying that her name had been used without her knowledge as the guarantor for a mortgage on Kajiyama's property. She was thinking about going to the cops.

I flipped through all the real estate deeds we had for Kajiyama, but nothing came close to the property mentioned in the article. I tried to get a deed to his 900,000-yen-a-month apartment in Minato-ku, but as it was a rental no information was available.

I did write an article about how Kajiyama's name had appeared on the roster for the Jinnai-gumi before his boss rose through the ranks to become the chairman of the Goryo-kai, a second-tier Yamaguchi-gumi organization. In other words, up until a year before, Kajiyama had been a registered member of a Yamaguchi-gumi crime group.

What was the point of all this? I wanted, in my own way, to demonstrate that the Emperor was a yakuza and that his whole empire was a yakuza operation. If I could, the case could go forward, and I'd have a scoop.

Harry gave a nod to my effort, but his take on it went like this: "It stands as a story, but it is not a great story. The real story for me is how several hundred non-yakuza had no qualms about working in the loan-sharking industry. That's a side of the story that no one is writing about. We expect yakuza to do nasty things, to exploit people and rip them off. What's unusual is that so many non-yakuza are willing to help them out."

He was right. Kajiyama was definitely a yakuza, but he had "civilians" doing a lot of the work for him.

There is organized crime and then there is ORGANIZED CRIME. The guy was practically a modern-day Professor Moriarty. Kajiyama's empire was a laundry list of front companies: a real estate agency, a construction firm, a share in a marina … The guy wasn't just a loan shark; he was a franchise. He ran a sex parlor. He laundered money by forcing his employees to be regulars there, but the girls were so unattractive that the employees often just went to pay and left without getting any service. He established a religious corporation in Hokkaido and forced employees to make donations. They were instructed by the various agency managers to attend meetings at a hotel in Tokyo. The donations were supposed to be paid from the profits made at each loan shark shop.

Most of his front companies had SK, as in Susumu Kajiyama, as part of the name: SK Housing, SK Finance, and so on. Let me elaborate, lest the full reach of the operation go unnoticed: Employees at each loan-sharking shop were obliged to buy their lunches from SK Shokuhin. With the profits from the shops, managers were obliged to dine at a Korean barbecue restaurant that happened to be owned by a cohort of Kajiyama's; thus were funds laundered. Managers and employees were obliged to take their leisure at designated hot springs and beach resorts, where transportation and accommodations were arranged, thus laundering

more funds. This was a new breed of yakuza; he was the future. Here was a guy who knew how to cheat everyone. He wasn't called the Emperor for nothing.

SK Finance in Shinjuku looked very much like a branch of Promise, the consumer loan company listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange. There it was: SK FINANCE printed in white against a blue background. The firm had been licensed as a consumer loan operation by the Tokyo government, and the license was on display so as to demonstrate its bona fides. SK Finance had gotten the *tōichi* rating *(tō* from Tokyo, *ichi* as in number one), which was given to outfits of this kind. In other words, the majority of the firms had been given permission to operate without any real background check.

SK Finance was also a realty, and the license was proof of it. This was a good deal for Kajiyama's gang. Real property would be taken as collateral for a loan, and if the debtor defaulted, it would be seized and sold, all without the participation of an annoying middleman who would claim a share of the profit. And of course there was the usual renting and leasing of properties.

I wanted a photo of Kajiyama. I went to SK Housing's branch office, also in Shinjuku, but it appeared to have already gone out of business. I went to one of his other real estate agencies near the station, and to my surprise, the staff were quite helpful. They didn't even flinch at the fact that I was a foreigner. Within minutes they located a very spacious apartment above a very conveniently located pachinko parlor. I gave it serious consideration. But my goal was to get a company brochure with Kajiyama's mug on it, and there wasn't any.

One employee—in his early thirties, short-cropped hair dyed neoblond, wearing a cheap gray suit and sneakers—was cleaning up the place, packing boxes, a little forlorn. I introduced myself as a reporter for the *Yomiuri Shinbun* and asked if he'd be willing to answer a few questions. He looked at me, annoyed, and then picked up a box of desk supplies and shoved it into my chest. "If you want

to talk, help me move this crap downstairs," he said. How could I refuse?

As we were stacking up the boxes (the police seemed to have taken everything newsworthy), I asked, "Didn't you realize you were working for the yakuza?"

He shrugged. "As far as I could tell, it was just a real estate agency. I answered an ad in one of those job recruitment magazines. How the hell was I supposed to know? I never saw anybody with missing fingers or whole-body tattoos."

"Have you always worked at this shop?"

"No, I worked at one of the SK loan shops. It seemed all right to me."

"Didn't you think the rates were high?"

"I just dealt with the customers, didn't do any deals. Yeah, maybe the rates were high, but I never thought it was so odd. I used to work at Aiful, which is supposed to be legit. You think Aiful charged legal rates? We charged what we could get away with. It's always a bad deal for the borrower. As far as I was concerned, this was the same business, just a different company."

"So you had no idea either SK company was a yakuza front company? And you didn't know your consumer loan company was really a loan shark operation?"

"You say 'consumer loan' and 'loan shark' like they're two different things."

"They're not?"

"A guy comes in for a onetime loan, and we charge him an incredible interest rate, and for the next few months or years he keeps paying back that loan. By the time it's done, he's paid maybe five, ten times the principal. This isn't a nice job, but it's a job. And you should look at the *Yomiuri*. It's full of ads for Aiful, Promise, Takefuji, and every consumer loan company under the sun. You guys support the loan-sharking industry."

"But you never knew?"

“I knew after a while. Everybody did. But it was too late. You’re in, the money is good. You just worry what the hell is going to happen to you if you leave. If they let you leave.”

“What about the illegal activity? Didn’t you worry about getting arrested?”

“Yeah, but they told us it’s only a fine and they’ll pay for it. They’ll pay for the lawyer. They’ll take care of us. I believed them. And yeah, the money was good. The bosses would do crazy things that kept the morale up. Last April, they rented Tokyo Dome and had a private baseball game. We had Tokyo Dome all to ourselves. It was great.”

That was exactly what the *Yomiuri* had done during my first year as a reporter. I didn’t mention that, of course. The *Yomiuri* had done it to give the reporters across the country a sense of unity, maybe foster loyalty to the company. Kajiyama was thinking the same thing. He was no fool.

And the employee was right. The *Yomiuri* and every other newspaper in Japan derived a lot of revenue from advertising from consumer loan companies.

Our resident financial reporter, Mizoguchi, had to lobby for months to get permission for a feature series on the damage loan sharks inflict on Japanese society. It was a subject a little too close for comfort. And when it became apparent that many consumer loan companies were also charging illegal rates, it took a considerable amount of convincing to get that news out. In the end, though, as usually was the case at the *Yomiuri*, the news won out over corporate interests. The pivotal event was a triple suicide of a husband and wife and a sibling in Osaka in June 2003. They threw themselves in front of a train. The woman had left a note about how a loan she had taken out had snowballed into a debt that could never be repaid, how the collectors had threatened her, threatened her neighbors, destroyed her life, and how the police were unable to help.

When three people are driven to commit suicide by debt collectors, people take notice. And it was criminals like Kajiyama who were behind those deaths. Sometimes, as a reporter, you forget the victim. You develop a kind of admiration for criminal genius and ruthless efficiency, and you forget that the criminal empire is built on human pain and suffering.

Kajiyama was a franchising genius, and the loan-sharking operation he had put into place was elaborate and comprehensive. His desire to go after people with bad credit histories produced results. As he himself said, "The best people to loan money to are people already in debt. They're so desperate that they will pay any interest rate you demand as long as they can have the cash right away. Once they borrow from us, they'll never be able to pay it back. We own them." He hired a computer geek he named Akiba-kun (after Akihabara, the electronics district in Tokyo) to create a database of the customers. Thus, every customer had a record of debt and payment, contact with the police or a lawyer, as well as detailed personal information, including supervisors, family members, even mistresses.

When it became apparent that a customer was growing desperate, Kajiyama would have another shop approach him with the offer of a loan—usually at an even higher interest rate. In other words, Kajiyama would prey on the same borrower many times in different ways. He had been careful to avoid attracting the attention of the authorities, but the operation had become too big not to be noticed.

When the police began raiding the corporate centers of Kajiyama's operations in 2003, they found rows of computer terminals in the offices. Kajiyama was years ahead of them in IT infrastructure.

With the money Kajiyama had kicked back to the Goryo-kai in Shizuoka, they had built a three-story headquarters. The name was chiseled into stone, then filled with gold. Other funds greased the palms of Japanese politicians. The Emperor contributed more than 4 million yen (about $40,000) to the former LDP politician and bigwig Kamei Shizuka over several years. And that was only the money that was on the books.

By October 23, 2004, the TMPD had evidence to link Kajiyama's operations to the Yamaguchi-gumi and could justify a raid on the Yamaguchi-gumi head office in Kobe. But once again everyone—cop, criminal, *and* journalist—knew the day before that the raid was going to happen. The Yamaguchi-gumi had even sent a formal inquiry to the police asking for the date and time of the raid, so it could be prepared. Given the reputation of the Hyogo Prefecture Police, however, it was probably the other way around. I myself had been talking to some yakuza and ex-yakuza in anticipation of the event. But during a night of socializing, the senior reporter from the Kyodo News Service just happened to mention to Chuckles that they were upping the ante and running a story about the raid *before the raid took place*.

Suddenly, all the journalists were thrown into a panic. Chuckles gathered all the rival reporters together for a kind of journalistic bid rigging: everyone agreed to run the story so that no one was left holding the bag. Thus, the *Yomiuri* itself had a huge article announcing the impending raid in the morning edition on the day of the raid.

The raid itself was over in twenty-five minutes. The cops wore bright red jackets that resembled happi coats, which lent the proceedings a festive touch. As they stormed in, the characteristic taunts and shouts of the yakuza could be heard a long way from the one-block fortress that was Fort Kobe, the Yamaguchi-gumi headquarters.

"Twenty-five minutes? That's not a raid—that's a tea party," sneered Harry Potter. "They probably spent the first ten minutes exchanging business cards. I bet the evidence was packaged and ready to go."

"They probably threw in a gun as a souvenir," I added oh-so-cynically.

"The boss is probably at this moment breaking it to one of the chinpira, 'In order to let the police save face, you're going to have to do a couple years in the slammer.'"

In the evening, I finished up my magnum opus on another Yamaguchi-gumi loan-sharking business. This one involved video rental shops as the storefronts. The cop I talked with from OC Investigative Division 3 described the situation by comparing the Yamaguchi-gumi operation to a big box behemoth sneaking into a mom-and-pop shop neighborhood.

My source at the Organized Crime Task Force added, “Up until now yakuza loan sharking was a petty crime, hard to prosecute, with a slap on the wrist for the perp. I’m ashamed to say it, but we couldn’t be bothered with it.” Which was probably why the Community Safety Bureau was running the offense.

The article dispatched, I prepared to clear out of the office. I joked with Chuckles that if we didn’t leave right away, we’d probably get caught up rushing to the scene of a horrible crime. And indeed, an hour and a half later, while I was at home relaxing with my wife and daughter, the bureau chief called to say someone had been stabbed and killed in front of Mitaka station.

Hyper mode kicked in: phone calls to the local cops, the local hospital, the local businesses, the local photographers. There was not a lot of cooperation, but we did manage to patch together an article.

At two in the morning I headed out to Roppongi.

I had set up a little information network of strippers, prostitutes, hostesses, touts, and street vendors. As a result, I knew who was dealing and who was supplying, and I also had an early-warning system in place that would inform me when there was to be a big raid on a club. Drug busts were news only if someone famous got caught, but you had to know about the bust in order to have something to work with.

I met my favorite Chilean tout at the Propaganda bar; he’d said he had some info for me. Nami, a Thai stripper who had been married to a Japanese cab driver, brought us a round of drinks. Neither of them knew—nobody knew—that I was a reporter; they thought I

was an insurance investigator. That seemed to cover a lot of ground and allay suspicions about probing questions.

After getting drunk at Propaganda with little to show for it, I headed to Quest, a dance club, where the guy spinning the roulette wheel was dealing drugs under the table. (The Japanese owner of the club was knifed to death a few years later; nobody knows who did it.)

At the steps in front of Quest, I lit a cigarette while fending off propositions from transsexual Colombian prostitutes who had flocked near the public toilet, making crow imitations. A blond girl in a party dress approached me, asking directions. I told her I was going to Shinjuku and offered her a lift. In the taxi, she told me her story: she was from Israel and was earning a living in Tokyo as a hostess and hating it. If only the Japanese clients knew how much those women despised them.

It was four in the morning when I got to the little hostess bar in Kabukicho where I was going to meet my source. I wanted to know more about Kajiyama, and this guy would know. I called him Cyclops. (I suppose Mono-Brow would have been a more precise nickname. He had a round, flat face with bushy eyebrows fused together over his hawklike nose. Whatever his nickname, it was a pretty intimidating look.)

I knew Cyclops from Saitama. He was Japanese of Korean ancestry (North Korean originally, with relatives in South Korea). He was also a member of the Yamaguchi-gumi with an encyclopedic knowledge of the underworld. He was an excellent source, but there was an evilness to him. I trusted his intel but never his motivations. He also had a serious speed habit, and he exhibited the erratic behavior, the extreme emotions, and the paranoia that methamphetamine addicts are known to have. He was also extremely violent when provoked.

I knew Cyclops through his father, who had invested heavily in a Korean-run credit union/bank that eventually had to be bailed out by the Japanese government. The reason for the bank going under,

according to a different yakuza source, was corporate malfeasance and bad loans to the Inagawa-kai crime group. Along with two other reporters, I pursued the story for almost a year before finally getting something into print. Our investigative reporting had the gratifying result of spurring the Saitama police into arresting the people responsible for the bank failure.

No investor got his money back, but the Korean community was happy to see justice done. In the time I spent working on the story, I had become friendly with many of them. I felt a certain affinity for those guys. It was like finding another Jew at Rockbridge Elementary School. And that was when Cyclops's father introduced me to his son.

Cyclops was persistent; he kept pestering me about when the article would appear. It was not easy to get something about the bank failure in the paper—partly because the repercussions of writing about a failed financial institution are huge, partly because no one really cared about what was considered (erroneously) a Korean problem, and partly because a religious organization involved with the bad loans was exerting pressure to keep everything quiet. And, oh yes, also partly because a prominent politician had his fingers in the pudding. I was able to get the story into print after managing to get a copy of the Saitama prefectural government's internal review of the bank. It was scathing.

I had promised Cyclops and his father that I wouldn't stop until the story was published, and as far as Cyclops was concerned, I kept my promise. I didn't know much about the Yamaguchi-gumi at the time; its presence in the eastern part of Japan was neglible, so I didn't feel a need to know more. However, since Koreans tended to talk with one another laterally, regardless of which organized crime group they might be in, Cyclops was always good for a cross section of the gokudo world. He would talk freely of the gossip about the Sumiyoshi-kai and Inagawa-kai; I'd never asked him about his own organization. I figured that this would be the time.

It was hard to get Cyclops to come up to Tokyo; Saitama was his turf, and he felt safe there. But as arranged, there he was waiting for

me, sitting on a velvet couch in a typical Kabukicho hostess club. There were a bar, a karaoke machine, a tacky chandelier, and sofas lined against the wall with marble tables spaced in front of them. On each table were a bottle of whiskey, ice in a crystal bucket, water in a crystal pitcher, and a couple of crystal glasses. In crystal bowls there were peanuts, slices of dried squid, and assorted other nibbles. One of the girls was dutifully preparing him a whiskey and water.

Cyclops motioned for me to pull up a chair across from him. He had the girl mix me a drink (which I accepted with good manners), and we raised our glasses and said “Cheers” in Korean. That was all the Korean I knew, besides asking where the toilet was.

“Jake-san, what would you like to know?”

“You know the TMPD raided the Yamaguchi-gumi headquarters today.”

“Everyone knew about it two weeks ago.”

“I knew only one week ago. What I want to know is, where the hell is all the money Kajiyama made?”

“Hmm … Why do you want to know?”

“Because there’s a good story in it.”

“And if you write the story, what changes?”

“Nothing.”

“Then what’s the point?”

“It’s my job. I find information that nobody else has, and I serve the public’s right to know.”

“They have a right to know where Kajiyama stashed his money?”

“The victims do.”

“Victims. Interesting choice of words. Did anyone put a gun to their head and tell them to go borrow money at interest rates they couldn’t repay? Or borrow money for things they couldn’t afford? Did anyone do that?”

“No, but these are people who didn’t know what they were getting into and who were lied to when they signed the contract. Wouldn’t that make them victims?”

“Your Japanese sucks. The word isn’t *victim*—it’s *sucker.”*

“And the people who invested in Saitama Shogin were suckers too? They were greedy? They wanted too high a return? They should have invested in the stock market? Victims? Or suckers?”

Cyclops didn’t say anything for a second. He was thinking it over. He wasn’t happy with the conclusion. He frowned. He bit his lip, and then he relaxed, patting himself down for his cigarettes.

“You want the story. I’ll give you the story. It was in Las Vegas.”

“Las Vegas?”

“Kajiyama blew a couple million dollars at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. He lost it gambling, but maybe you can call that money laundering. He’s spent a lot of time in the United States. He puts the cash in a safe deposit box here and pulls it out when he goes over there. He has some overseas bank accounts too.”

He lit up a Lark with a gold-plated Dunhill lighter, inhaled, exhaled. Those lighters were obviously an essential yakuza fashion accessory.

“Do the cops know this?” I asked him.

“Oh, I think so. They’ve probably seized the money by now or they’re going to do it pretty soon. Kajiyama’s a VIP at the Grand. A high roller at Caesars Palace too.”

“How does a guy like Kajiyama end up as a VIP at the MGM Grand or Caesars Palace?”

“Goto. Goto introduced him. Goto loves those places. He used to go to them a lot.”

“Used to go?”

“Ever since his liver transplant, Goto can’t get into the States. The word I heard was that he used a casino account to pay his hospital bill.”

“Goto had a liver transplant in the United States? How the hell did that happen?”

“I thought you were interested in Kajiyama?”

“Yeah, but Goto, the Godfather of Japanese crime, getting a liver transplant in the United States. That’s wild. Where?”

“Los Angeles. A university hospital. UCLA. Dumont.”

“Dumont. UCLA—I got it.”

“Yeah, well. Anyway, follow the Vegas angle. It should be good. Maybe you can get a free trip to Vegas out of it.”

“Kajiyama is definitely in the organization, right?”

“Do you see a letter of excommunication floating around? If you’re not kicked out of the organization, you’re still in the organization. That’s how it works. So he’s an albatross right now. Bringing down a lot of heat on the organization. Everyone knew this would happen. That’s why, two years ago, they started taking his name off the rosters. Nobody wants a paper trail.”

“How much did Kajiyama have in the casino?”

“Between two casinos, about four million U.S. Probably has another million in U.S. bank accounts. He had two million dollars in cash deposited with the MGM Grand’s offices here. Not bad, huh?”

“How the hell do you collect two million dollars of American currency in Japan?”

“You just need a lot of flunkies with a lot of time. Anyway, if you’re trying to follow the money, look in your homeland, Jake-san.”

I felt a shiver up my spine. This sounded like a major scoop. And it was. It would certainly change my life.

We chatted for another hour. I asked him about his parents, and he asked me about my family. I showed him some pictures. But when I asked about the role of the Yamaguchi-gumi in Kajiyama’s operations, he didn’t give up anything more.

I got home at five in the morning. I managed to sleep for about an hour before Beni woke up and crawled over and stuck her fingers in my nose. I had the whole day to spend with the family. It was like a holiday.

On Tuesday, still keeping things to myself, I called up a friend, someone I could trust, at the FBI in Washington, D.C. He confirmed what Cyclops had said. He said the TMPD had already made visits to Las Vegas and had in fact seized $2 million in cash from the MGM Grand's office in Tokyo. Cyclops's figures were on the money. He wouldn't tell me anything else, but it was enough for me to go to Chuckles and Harry with.

Chuckles was shocked. "Are you serious? Where did you get that?"

I thought it best not to mention my Yamaguchi-gumi connection. To admit that wouldn't be good for my source or for me. So I told her it was the FBI, which was sort of true. She wanted to write up the story immediately; I suggested we talk to Harry Potter first.

Harry was stretched out on the sofa trying to open the centerfold of the *Weekly Gendai* when Chuckles and I went up to him. As he listened, he grew quite animated, realizing that this could be an impressive little scoop—especially since the cash had already been seized. Then he did something he rarely did: he took off his glasses and polished them, and he smiled. He smiled so wide that his teeth showed. It was weird. There was a gap between his two front teeth that made him look like Alfred E. Neuman.

"Jake, you may not be as worthless as we thought you were," he said. It was a huge compliment, and I'm sure I beamed (or blushed). He gathered his number two guy, and the four of us went out to lunch at a Chinese restaurant with a private dining room to discuss strategy. Harry wanted me to gather as much from the FBI side as I could; Harry and his number two would try to get confirmation from the TMPD top guys; Chuckles was ordered to lie low for a bit. She was our ace in the hole and would negotiate with the TMPD division chief for the scoop. In order for her to maintain positive

relations with the chief, she would have to be free to blame any undue snooping around and stepping on toes on me.

"Tell him Jake heard it from the CIA," Harry said. "Everyone thinks he's an agent anyway. Tell him Jake's out of control, has no understanding of the delicate relationship between the police and police reporters. Convince him that if we don't get the scoop, Jake will write it without your supervision, and who knows what kind of material he might reveal to damage the investigation. That should get his attention."

"Jake, sorry about this, eh?" Harry said, turning to me. "The chief will be pissed off, but he's not someone you have to work with anyway. Maybe some top guys will blame you for making them rush —this probably would've been enormous publicity for the TMPD— but don't let it bother you."

"I won't."

"Besides, you're a Jew. I'm sure you're used to getting blamed for everything."

In a couple days, we had everything we needed. I made a deal with a local reporter in Las Vegas who did some footwork for me in return for information. I would write the story first in Japan, and then he would get the scoop in Vegas. The time difference and the fact that only one in ten million Americans read Japanese newspapers made this arrangement possible.

Kajiyama was a "whale"—the Vegas term for a big-spending VIP. (A VIP, like a whale, is a rare species that consumes conspicuously.) He had been going to Vegas for more than ten years, and he had accounts with the casino as well as with a bank in California and had been withdrawing money in the United States. After a tip from U.S. authorities, the TMPD had, since summer, been sending officials to look into his Vegas transactions. The Department of Homeland Security, the Nevada Gaming Commission, and the FBI were all investigating him on suspicion of his violating U.S. money-

laundering laws. The MGM Grand was making a token effort at cooperating with the investigation.

Chuckles made a deal with the police division chief. Our scoop about Kajiyama and Vegas would be published first. Then the TMPD would announce its having seized more than $2 million of Kajiyama's in Tokyo, likely the illegal profits of his loan shark shops. We'd get the scoop on that. The TMPD then planned to rearrest Kajiyama for violations of Japan's money-laundering laws, while we'd get the scoop on the FBI's investigation into Kajiyama's money laundering in the United States.

Harry was much amused with the idea of an article under the headline "A Whale Called Kajiyama." In fact, as we stayed up until three in the morning working on the article, the idea started to seem funnier and funnier. Lack of sleep will do that.

By mid-November, it was showtime: "Two Million Dollars Seized from Emperor of Loan Shark's Safe Deposit Box." This was followed up with articles on the FBI investigation and how Kajiyama had spent his money in Vegas. We had three hits in a row, and the competition was reeling. (Petty, I know, but these are the great joys of the police beat.) The TMPD was so meticulous about keeping everyone lined up in a row, it was very hard to break rank.

I spoke with a Las Vegas reporter who said the Nevada Gaming Commission had gone on record about the case; hearing that brought me great relief. No matter how much fact-checking you do as a reporter in Japan, the risk you take for running an article without the official news release in your hands is high. The reward for a scoop doesn't match the penalty for getting a story wrong. Then when the police arrested one of Kajiyama's henchmen who had withdrawn more than a million dollars from Kajiyama's account and traveled numerous times to the United States carrying attaché cases full of cash, I began to feel a little smug.

To celebrate, I ran a mile and a half in less than twelve minutes. That was a first. I also did the unusual thing of going home early. I

picked up my daughter from preschool, and the three of us, Beni, Mrs. Adelstein, and myself, had dinner together. It was a rare event.

Some of our thunder was stolen a few weeks later when it was revealed that Kajiyama had stashed more than $50 million in a Swiss bank account with the help of a Japanese employee of Credit Suisse. Fifty million dollars was a lot more than several million dollars. The Swiss froze his account.

The yakuza like foreign banks; they find them useful. Credit Suisse wasn't the first foreign financial institution that had been used for money laundering. Citibank lost its private banking license in Japan in September 2004, in part because it was allegedly being used by the yakuza to launder money. According to a law enforcement figure familiar with the investigation, one of Citi Japan's biggest customers was Saburo Takeshita, a corporate blood brother of Tadamasa Goto himself. Another source claimed that another bigwig in the Yamaguchi-gumi had a bank account with Citi —in his own name. I can think of several foreign investment firms that are shaking hands with the yakuza even now, but I don't have enough money to afford to name them. (By the way, Citibank didn't learn its lesson; the Japanese government punished them again in June 2009 for similar problems.)

In any case, when the venue switched to Switzerland, Chuckles and Harry's number two took over the story. Money laundering was too much for my little brain, and I had other stories I wanted to pursue. In particular, Goto Tadamasa and his mysterious liver transplant.

Not all of the money Kajiyama deposited with U.S. casino offices in Tokyo was seized. Around the time of Kajiyama's arrest, one of Kajiyama's henchmen called up the Caesars Palace representative in Tokyo and had them bring him $1 million in cash. The money was delivered to a parking lot in central Tokyo. Now, that's service.

Kajiyama never cracked. Finally, on February 9, 2005, he was sentenced to seven years of hard labor, but initially the Tokyo courts chose not to fine him 5 billion yen ($50 million, equal to the total

he stole from people). We were disappointed. Who says crime doesn't pay? The Emperor probably still has money stashed away that no one knows about. He'll serve his time, and he'll come out a very wealthy man.

He didn't cut much of a dashing figure in court, but you could see some of his charisma. He's handsome and probably very charming. He had several mistresses who would vouch for that. They're probably waiting for him. And his money.

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Kajiyama's henchmen dispersed after his conviction, and the Goryo-kai no longer exists under that name. Some of his disciples went on to run elaborate "it's me" scams, which are sometimes complex operations where criminals impersonate the child or grandchild of a mark over the telephone, convincing the mark that because they are in trouble he should make an immediate cash transfer. These hardworking guys apparently didn't make as much money with this new enterprise—but at least it was a dishonest living.

Also pursuant to Kajiyama's conviction, Japanese lending laws were revised to make the penalties for loan sharking much harsher, and a crystal-clear cap was set on interest rates that even legitimate consumer loan companies could charge. We can only hope that the Japanese are able to learn from their American counterparts and discover the joys of credit card debt. When that happens, we can look forward to the appearance of a Yamaguchi-gumi Visa or MasterCard. It's the next logical step.

PART 3

夕暮れ

Dusk

The Empire of Human Trafficking

People pay their respects to the dead in different ways. I would have bought flowers to place on her grave, but the body hadn't shown up anywhere yet. So instead I pulled a 10,000-yen note out of my wallet and gave it to Fujiwara-san at the Polaris Project Japan. Polaris runs a hotline for human trafficking victims in Tokyo, and the folks there do a good job trying to raise public awareness.

Fujiwara-san said that the number of phone calls to Polaris had gone up quite a bit in the last year, mostly from Korean and Eastern European women. She thanked me for the donation and asked if I knew a Russian speaker. I promised I'd try to find her one.

I think I can trace the beginnings of burning out as a reporter to the period where I started covering this very nasty side of the Japanese sex industry. I didn't even realize it was burning me out until it was way too late.

If you spend enough years as a crime reporter, you get callous. It's only natural. If you grieved for every victim or shared the pain of the family, you'd become a mental case. Murder, arson, armed robbery, family suicide, they all become routine. There's a tendency to dehumanize the victims, sometimes to even be annoyed with them for ruining your day off or a planned vacation. It sounds horrible, and it is. But that's how it works.

I thought I knew a lot about the "dark side" of Japan. I'd covered the Lucie Blackman case, investigated a serial killer, nearly touched a body full of electricity, seen a man burn himself to death, and more. I thought I was pretty tough—in my own way.

I had become very cynical. And I had become a little cold, and, when a reporter starts to cool down, it's very hard for him or her to ever warm up again. We all build psychic armor around ourselves to cope with emotions and maintain control and meet our multiple deadlines. We have to.

I had covered Kabukicho and hunted for tips in Roppongi. The girls at Maid Station had been very frank about how their whole operation worked. I was pretty conversant with the legalities of the sex-for-money industry in Japan. In fact, I thought the whole idea of sexual slavery was some urban myth created by puritanical bureaucrats in the West who didn't understand Japan's sex culture. But I was about to get a real lesson.

It was November 2003 when my cell phone rang. *"Moshi moshi,"* I said, picking up.

It was a foreign woman, no one I knew but someone who could speak fairly good Japanese. I listened for a bit but wasn't making full sense of what she was saying. "Do you speak English?" I finally asked.

"Well, yes. You do too, obviously. I apologize for making you suffer through my deplorable Japanese."

"Not a problem. It's quite good. But since *eigo* is our native tongue, maybe it'd be better to use English, *ne?"*

"A friend gave me your number. She's a stripper at the Kama Sutra; she said you might be able to help."

"Try me."

"Well, at the place where I work, there are some new girls—from Poland, Russia, and Estonia—and they seem to be … under duress."

"Hmm. What do you mean?"

"They're being forced to work, and they're not getting paid. They're … like slaves."

"Like what?"

“Slaves. That’s how I would describe it.”

“And what kind of work do you do?”

“I guess you could say I’m a prostitute,” she replied straightforwardly, without embarrassment. “Officially I’m an English teacher, but sleeping with men is how I earn my living.”

“And you’re doing this by choice?”

“Of course. But these new girls they’ve brought into the club … it’s not the same for them. They don’t want to be doing this. They got tricked—forced—into doing this. They’re always sobbing, they can’t leave the building during the day.”

“I see,” I said. It was a pathetic response, I knew, but I didn’t know what else to say and it afforded me time to process the situation. I asked my caller what she wanted me to do.

“You’re a newspaper reporter. Write a story. Find out what’s going on and expose the bastards. And help get those girls out of there.”

It seemed like a hell of a tall order coming from someone who’d just called me out of the blue. I was about to say I’d look into it when something about her voice went *ding* in my head. “You say your friend gave you my number. Have we met?”

There was a pause.

“Have we?” I asked again.

“Well, when you were working on the Lucie Blackman story, talking to working girls at the bar, I kind of insulted you to your face.”

Over time, I had learned the rules of engagement for getting information from strippers, dancers, and other females in the evening entertainment trade. Apparently this young woman had met me before I’d learned those rules. Perhaps I’d been rude, or just not that savvy. Either way, she had called me an asshole. I remembered that much.

Her name was Helena. That wasn’t her real name, of course, but it did suit her. We met at a Starbucks in Roppongi, on the second

floor. She was dressed in a black skirt, a slim-cut black leather jacket over a lime green blouse, and knee-high black leather boots. I have to say, she looked good. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail, and the only makeup she appeared to have on was a ripe pomegranate–colored lipstick. She had a small mole over her upper lip.

I introduced myself as if we were meeting for the first time, giving her my meishi. She didn't give me hers until later. We talked about the weather, we sipped our coffee, and then she told me her story.

Helena had come to Japan in 2001 from Australia. She started teaching English at Berlitz and doing a little hostessing on the side. One evening after class, she had drinks with one of her students, a businessman in his fifties, and ended up accompanying him to a love hotel. When they were done, he laid five 10,000-yen notes (about $500) on the bed and said it was for her "travel expenses."

Helena gradually picked up more patrons and eventually, to ensure a steady income, took a job at an exclusive "gentlemen's club" called the Den of Delicious. She kept her private clients, but during the day she would perform services for the walk-in trade.

"I'm a prostitute by choice. I like sex. The money is far better than I could make teaching English. I don't have a problem with what I do. What I have a problem with is women who don't want to be prostitutes being forced into it. I have a problem with the assholes making them do it.

"There are two guys running the show in Roppongi and supplying girls for the club in Shibuya where I work. One guy is Japanese—everyone calls him Slick—[1*]and there's a Dutch-Israeli guy named Viktor. They own five or six clubs; they recruit the women overseas, mostly in poor countries, through ads or brokers, and they bring them to Japan. They stick them in sex clubs, and they rip them off. The women are totally dependent on these bastards. So they end up like sex slaves.

"What I heard was that, initially, they're promised more money than they can imagine, but when they get here, it's a whole different

story. They have to fuck to eat, because they don't have any options. And then they've got all these costs that they were never told about that get subtracted from their earnings. Slick tells them that since they're working illegally, they've got to work for him. Because he's legit—if you can believe that. If they don't want to work for him, that's up to them, but they aren't going to find work anywhere else in Roppongi. One girl I knew went to the police; she was threatened with being arrested herself. And then she ended up having to service the fucking cop.

"Viktor tells people he's been here six years. He started with dancers and moved up to prostitution; he's very proud of himself. He says he knows what kind of girls Japanese men like—blond and blue-eyed. Takes a lot to figure that out. Helps too if they're helpless, because then they have no choice but to do what they're told.

"Viktor likes to act like a nice guy—until it comes to money. Then he's the fucking devil in disguise … Slick, he's married and has a daughter."

Helena's story had the ring of truth. I didn't see any reason for her to lie. I didn't know, though. She was an observer, not a victim herself; this was hearsay; maybe she had an ax to grind. I told her I'd have to speak with one of the girls directly.

That got her a little upset. "If these girls get caught talking to you, they could get in trouble. Real trouble. You understand that, right?"

I said I did. I said I'd be careful. So Helena promised she'd introduce me to one of the girls. And we parted ways.

I did some checking on my own.

Sekiguchi popped into my mind, but this wasn't his beat. Then I thought of Alien Cop, who had done such a good job of showing me around Kabukicho. Alien Cop had since been transferred from the Shinjuku Police Department to the Tokyo Metropolitan Police headquarters, where he might be able to tap into some good

information. He'd be a good source. But in order to get what I wanted, I'd have to pay for it. A night on the town, certainly. A bar or strip club employing foreign women, definitely. It wouldn't be cheap, but by that point I had some connections.

I called up a lawyer acquaintance working for a company promoting mixed martial arts tournaments. These slugfests were like a cross between boxing, wrestling, and karate, and they were wildly popular. I talked him into coughing up two second-row seats, and I took them over to the manager of the Eighth Circle of Hell, a strip club, who agreed to comp me for the night.

I texted Alien, and we had a date.

Alien was still a decent, straightforward guy. We got caught up with our latest doings, and while a buxom redhead named Jasmine ground her curvaceous ass on his crotch and ran her fingers through his crew cut, I told him Helena's story. Jasmine was content to sip the champagne Alien had bought. When I was done with the story, Alien frowned. He lifted Jasmine off his lap and told her, in fairly good English, "Please go get me some smokes, angel. I must talk to my friend now. Come back in five minutes." Jasmine dutifully excused herself and was gone.

"You know," Alien said, sucking on a cigarette and switching back to Japanese, "I'll look into it. What your friend says is probably true. I see more women like that now, but there isn't much I can do to help them. It bugs me."

"It bugs you?"

"I like women in the business like that. I know my money is buying their attentions, but I like them anyway. It's a game. But when a woman doesn't want to be in the business, if she's being forced to do it, then I don't want to be with her. It's not fun. It's not a game then. Your friend is right: if they're not getting paid, that's not okay."

He took a notepad out of his pocket and I gave him what I'd been able to find out: the location of Slick's office and the real estate deed, which was under the name of J Enterprise.

Jasmine was taking more than five minutes to come back. While we waited, our conversation got personal.

“Jake, you ever sleep with any of these women at the clubs? They seem to like you. I can see that.”

“They like me because I don’t sleep with them. I don’t want to sleep with them. This makes me different from the usual customers.”

“Because you don’t like white women?”

“No, because it’s a bad idea.”

“Why?”

“Because they give me information sometimes and you’re not supposed to sleep with your sources. I did before I was married but not now. I might bring home some horrible STD and give it to my wife, who would hate me and dump me.”

“Well, what if there was this hot girl who had some information you really wanted—but she’d give it to you only if you slept with her?”

“Yeah, I would sleep with a woman for good information. I’m a total information whore. What about you, Alien? You ever sleep with a source?”

“Of course. It’s like a fringe benefit. I’m not married; I don’t have kids.”

“So you think I’d be a slimeball if I did what you’re doing?”

“No. I just think you’re strange. Not a strange gaijin but a strange person. You have a code. You stick to it. It’s a weird code, but it’s a code. I admire that. And you’re a good guy. Now, don’t take this the wrong way, but I’ll tell you something …”

“Tell me.”

“You’ll break your code sooner or later. Vice does it to you. Like the saying goes, lie down with dogs and get up with fleas. You’ll get fleas.”

“I’ll get a flea collar.”

“Hah. Won’t work. You’ll sleep with someone not just for money or information but because it seems like the thing to do. Like shaking hands. It’s a slippery slope. And you won’t even feel guilty about it. It won’t occur to you that it isn’t right or out of the ordinary. The job screws you up. You should ask for another posting. You’re lucky you’re already married, at least. I could never get married.”

“Why not?” I asked, now surprised.

“Because I’ve spent too much time with people that sex doesn’t have any meaning for. It already doesn’t mean anything to me. I couldn’t be faithful to one woman, and I wouldn’t believe she could be faithful to me. Monogamy is bullshit. Sex is like exchanging New Year’s cards, a ritual. I understand that for the rest of the world it’s different. It’s a big deal to them. I’m out of sync with the normal world, and I won’t be in sync with it ever again. I’ll never marry a regular chick because the gap would bury us. I could marry a prostitute, but she’d have to promise to have sex with me primarily. Otherwise it wouldn’t be safe, and I might get jealous. Maybe I could marry another cop who had worked vice. But not a hostess. They’re bloodsuckers.”

“That’s pretty bleak.”

“Wait and see. You’ll understand. But let me tell you one thing that I’ve learned about all this cheating and monogamy shit: Never admit anything. Never confess. If you love the woman you principally want to be with, the main one, then lie. Confession is for the confessor. It makes you feel good; it ruins the lives of everyone else. It’s a selfish thing to do. Don’t confess.”

“That’s not advice I expect to get from a cop.”

“I’m only telling you because I think you have got a good heart. When you talk to me about these girls, I can see it bothers you. You’re like me, you dig these women. So I’m telling you an important secret of life. Never confess.”

Jasmine came back, cigarettes in hand. She sat on Alien’s lap, swigged directly from the champagne bottle, lit a cigarette, sucked

suggestively on it, and then put the cigarette between Alien's lips, her left hand cradling the back of his head. She turned to me and smiled and then looked over my shoulder. A tall, thin brunette in a black silky negligee was sauntering over to our table. She sat gently on my lap. I ordered her a drink as Alien readied himself to go to the back room for a private dance.

• • •

Alien Cop came through with some strong information. And three days later, after knocking on doors and trading favors for information on my own, I had the book on Slick and Viktor's operation. A lot of it was confirmation of what Helena had told me; some filled in the gaps.

The company fronting the operation was, no surprise, J Enterprise, a Roppongi-based LLC that was not registered with the Japanese authorities. The company was owned and run by Slick Imai. Viktor was his partner. Their operation involved bringing foreign women into the Tokyo area and placing them in sex clubs and massage parlors. Slick ran four clubs—Club Angel, Den of Delights, Club Divine, and Club Codex—in the Roppongi area, supplied the Den of Delicious in Shibuya, and ran an escort service on the side. He was the king of foreign flesh in the ward, pocketing the equivalent of $20,000 a month.

The focus of Slick's recruitment was girls from Israel and also Hungary, Poland, and other countries in Eastern Europe. He placed hostesses wanted ads on www.jobsinjapan.com. One Canadian girl, age twenty-two, who responded to the ad was filtered through a recruiting agency in Germany before she eventually got to Japan. In 2003, the firm was known as Entertainment Valentina; the name may have changed. Typically the girls were promised an astronomical 4 million yen ($40,000!) a month for working as high-class hostesses, accompanying rich businessmen to dinner. The company agreed to pay an agent in their home country a fee of 3,000 euros for the girl's airfare and lodging in Tokyo.

Once the girl arrived in Tokyo, she was met and taken to the company apartment, which she would share with other working girls. If she hadn't figured it out by then, she would quickly be informed what was expected of her. Financial pressure, lies, subtle (and not-so-subtle) threats to hurt her family, and plain and simple indoctrination were brought to bear.

The girls worked a full nine-hour shift at a sex parlor and earned the equivalent of about $100 a day; of this $75 was reclaimed as fees. Essentially this left the women $25 per day, a far cry from the $40,000 a month they'd been promised. All were on tourist visas, which is good for a three-month stay and don't allow employment. The benefit of this—for Slick and Viktor—was the revolving-door supply of fresh girls as well as constantly collecting on the hiked-up airfare. Many girls left the country actually owing Slick money.

Viktor, who was tall and good-looking, was rumored to be married to a Japanese woman, which would have given him solid ground to conduct business in Japan.

A source at the Ministry of Justice uncovered a company that had been registered under Slick's name: "R&D," a car-importing, clothing sales, consulting, and insurance brokerage firm established in 1993, apparently no longer in business. The director of the firm, Ko Kobayashi, had had a brush with the Prostitution Prevention Law; he'd been arrested in 1989 in Shizuoka (Goto-gumi territory) for bringing Taiwanese women into the country and putting them to work as prostitutes. Slick had allegedly been on the board of directors. So it was clear that Slick had a history of trafficking since way back.

Alien Cop had one pretty disturbing bit of news: Slick could not be touched. I suspected as much because his intel had provided one of the keys to breaking open the Lucie Blackman case. Until the TMPD got a new chief in the Roppongi jurisdiction, Slick was free to do as he pleased. Slick had done one good deed in his life; everybody else had been paying for it ever since.

Viktor did most of his recruiting directly in Europe. He handled the logistics and arranged sex tours to the Maldives, which was the real moneymaker.

By early December, I had enough material together to write a story. I showed a draft to my supervisor at the time, Yamakoshi, aka Steve McQueen. Why he considered himself the Japanese equivalent of Steve McQueen instead of, say, Tom Cruise beats me, but he was interested.

However, given the sensational nature of the story, he wanted about twenty things cleared first. He turned the story and me over to Mr. Bowtie, the scariest, most demanding editor/senior reporter in the National News Department.

Over coffee Bowtie told me, in no uncertain terms, what he wanted. One was that I talk to the brokers/traffickers and hear their side of the story. The other was that I find an "innocent victim."

"What do you mean by 'innocent victim'?"

"What do you think I mean, shithead? Some slut who comes to Japan to make a couple thousand dollars a night on her back and finds out she isn't going to make so much, that's hardly a crime. I want a girl who was duped, an innocent. I want a sad story. If it's just an underpaid whore unhappy with her job, you don't have a story."

"I don't think you get it."

"I get it. I know the deal. I'm just telling you how it is. You want to write the story, write a story that will make people feel sorry for those innocent women and hate the traffickers. If you can't do that, you don't have a story. And you're wasting my time and your time."

I didn't like his attitude, but I was hell-bent on writing this story. The fact was, it was becoming a cause with me. So I leaned on Helena for help. She told me how to reach one of the women who'd escaped, Veronika. She had been lucky enough to steal back her passport before fleeing.

Veronika was short and thin, and her blond hair had been pulled back into a sloppy ponytail. She did not look well. A thick layer of makeup obscured but didn't hide the dark circles under her eyes. She was wearing a white leather coat with a fur collar. Her left ear looked as if it had been crushed.

She was twenty-six, from a small village thirty miles from Warsaw. "I saw this ad on the Internet: 'Work in Japan as a hostess! Anyone can make a lot of money in a short time! Now hiring blond women.' I answered the ad.

"I went to Warsaw and met this talent company representative named Mikel. He showed me pictures of a club—a really extravagant place—and he said, 'You'll be here, dancing with Japanese men, chatting with them in English. For one hour you'll earn a hundred dollars U.S.' My daughter was six, so I asked my mother to take care of her. I left Warsaw and flew to Tokyo. I was given instructions to go to the ANA Hotel, and there I first met Viktor. He was from the Netherlands, very handsome, and played the part of a perfect gentleman. I felt so relieved.

"Viktor drove me to where I would be staying. He said that I was probably tired from the long flight, so I could relax. It would be fine if I started work tomorrow. He took me to the apartment—it was on the fourth floor in a building in Nishi-Azabu. I remember the address very well. At the apartment were a Colombian girl and a Canadian girl. Three people in one tiny room. I started to feel a little uneasy. Viktor pulled out a drawer and told me to put anything of value in it, including my passport, so that it wouldn't be stolen. I did as he said.

"The next day, around five in the afternoon, Viktor and Slick, a Japanese man, came to the apartment. They then took us to the Den. It was totally different from the picture I was shown in Poland. Viktor very rudely told us we were to work there. I got mad, thinking what the hell is this? Then the two guys explained the job to us: We were going to be providing sex services. Give massages and jerk the men off. For oral sex, we would get four thousand yen [$40]. Whether we had customers or not, they would collect

seventy-five hundred yen [$75] from us each day. If we didn't pay, that amount would become a 'loan' we would have to pay back. The plane ticket was the first thing they were charging us for; they said we already owed them three hundred thousand yen [$3,000]. The apartment cost was ten thousand yen [$100] a day. 'Don't drag your feet about it,' they said. 'If you want more money, you can sleep with a customer; you can make twenty thousand yen [$200] for that. You have three months in this country, so if you work, you can pay back all your loans.'

"I was horrified. I was absolutely repulsed, but there was nothing I could do. I left the bar, but I didn't know Tokyo at all, not even the way back to the apartment. Somehow, though, I remembered certain places, and after two or three hours, I made it back to the apartment. I thought I would grab my passport and plane ticket and get ready to go back home. When I got back, though, everything had been taken from the drawer. There was nothing I could do but wait.

"When I saw Viktor, his face was so … proud and triumphant. I was angry. 'What the hell are you doing? Give back my passport! Give me my return ticket! You're a thief, and if you don't give them back, I'll go to the police.' He was totally unfazed, and he told me, 'We're the ones who bought the ticket—the ticket was ours, not yours. I'm not stealing anything, you ungrateful bitch. Go try the police. You have no passport, right? They'll arrest you for being an illegal alien. The police here are worse than the hounds of Hell. Please, by all means, go ahead and try it. They'll deport you, but the money you owe us won't disappear. Quite the contrary. We'll get compensation from you. I know where your family lives, and my friends know, too.'

"My daughter I had left with my mother. The man who introduced me to all of this knew where they lived. With Viktor's threat, I was very afraid. I thought they would hurt my family. I thought that if I escaped, while I was escaping, my daughter would be killed … and my mother, too. If I could do it over, I would have gone to my embassy. But I worried that Viktor could have somehow

messed that up for me too. I thought that he might even have friends in the embassy. God, I was stupid.

“I had no place to sleep, no money, and nowhere I could go. There was only ‘work.’ It was the first time I had done anything like that. They had explained that for just a massage, it was a thousand yen [$10]. I hated doing it, but I did. Touching the men was one part of it, but the clients always demanded a blow job. I got more money for that. For the first week, I only did massage, but Viktor and Slick were demanding ten thousand yen [$100] a day for the apartment. So I tried to do a blow job, but I just couldn’t do it with someone I didn’t know. I started choking really violently. I started to hate myself. One day, I started crying and went begging to the manager of the shop. He said that he’d had no idea they’d taken my passport. I don’t know what he said to Viktor, but he got back my passport for me. The manager told me that I could try to look for work at another place. Then he lent me his telephone, so I called my mother and daughter and told them to go to a safe place. They said that Viktor had called them once. I wanted to go straight home to them, but I couldn’t. I had no money.

“I looked for work at a different hostess club, but the fact I was doing that got back to Viktor almost immediately. He came to the club and said to me, ‘You can’t work in Roppongi. I am in charge of you. Nobody will give a job to an ungrateful bitch like you.’ Slick was with him, too.

“I didn’t come to Japan to be a prostitute. I was promised a job as a hostess. The shop manager had given me my ticket and passport, so the next day, I decided I would run away. I spoke with some women who were in the same situation I was in, and we made a plan to go to the police, but everyone got so scared they ended up not going. They said things like ‘They’ll arrest us’ or ‘Now we can’t repay the loan, but if we go, we have to get a lawyer’ and ‘Japanese prisons are terrible.’

“Viktor is unforgiveable. Slick too. Hell is too good for them.

“They also do sex tours, you know, for businessmen. They have a big boat in the Maldives, and the girls are the escorts. The men can sleep with a different girl every evening if they like … There was another Polish girl who told me she worked on one of these tours. She was promised two hundred thousand yen [$2,000] for five days, but Viktor kept taking money out for ‘rent’ and ended up only paying her half of what he owed her. ‘It was like a vacation for you,’ he told her. ‘I don’t think one hundred thousand yen is too much to pay for a vacation.’

“I don’t understand it. Why do the Japanese police allow this? They know it is happening, but they think that women who come to Japan are all prostitutes. I thought I would go to the police when I went back home, but I’m worried about my family.

“This Russian woman, Karina, went on one of the tours I was on in November. She was bad-tempered, always fought with customers. One night she disappeared. Viktor told us she had pretended to have stomach pains so they took her to the hospital on the island and she ran away. No one believed him. I saw her tiptoeing out of the room where she was spending the night, and she definitely didn’t look like she was running off. When she didn’t come back, I looked in her room; there was no trace of her, but by the bed there was blood and it looked like someone had tried to clean it up. You could smell the detergent. I got so frightened. I couldn’t ask anybody. Asking is dangerous. I couldn’t even say anything to the other women. There was a guy on board who was in the Japanese mafia. The day after Karina disappeared, he had a deep cut on his face. Maybe she resisted and he killed her. That’s what I think. Maybe it was just a coincidence. That’s what I want to think.

“They gave me a little extra money at the end. I think it was hush money. Probably, when everyone went home, they just wanted to forget this horrible experience.

“There’s no point in going to the Japanese police to complain. Even if I told the local police in Poland, they’d just call me a whore.

“I don’t want to be with a man anymore. I don’t even want to be with anyone. That’s how I feel now. I’m just … filthy. Not even a woman. Not anything.”

Veronika talked for a long time. I scrawled notes while she did. What she had to say was not too different from what I’d heard elsewhere. Different motives for coming to Japan, different details, but the same fundamental horror story.

I wanted to go after Viktor first but needed to get his number.

To do so, I spent an evening at Dispario buying drinks for Kiki, the craziest Israeli girl I’d ever met. She was so tan that she looked like a cinnamon Pop-Tart, and her hairdo was an honest-to-god Afro. She was Viktor’s ex-girlfriend.

I tried to charm her into giving me Viktor’s number but she’d either been warned or was naturally wary, maybe both. I wasn’t getting very far and was running out of money. Two hours and 20,000 yen ($200) into the evening, Kiki was very drunk but still not talking. Well, she was talking but not about anything I wanted to hear. She could barely sit up. I propped her up and started massaging her shoulders.

“You give a great massage! Where did you learn that?”

“Swedish Massage School. Class of ’85.”

She laughed. “You’re such a liar! Don’t stop.”

I massaged her neck, moved on to her hands for another few minutes, and then tried to close the deal. “Kiki, I have to get home,” I said.

She put her head in my lap and looked up at me. “Don’t go.”

“I have reports to write up. If you call me after work, I’ll come meet you and I’ll give you a full body massage. Without any funny stuff.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Full body? Okay, you’re on.”

At three in the morning, she rang, raging drunk, demanding the massage. I made my way back to Dispario, and we walked to a love hotel. As soon as we got into the room, she stripped off her clothes, jumped on the bed, exhaled, and said, “I am so tired. Massage me!”

So I did. For about twenty minutes, which was just enough to relax her but not enough to let her fall asleep. A good massage is not supposed to result in sexual arousal, but I wasn’t giving her a good massage. I wanted her aroused. It worked.

She turned over and grabbed her breasts. “You’re doing me so good, you can fuck me.”

“I can’t fuck you. I have things on my mind.”

“Like what?”

“Like Viktor’s telephone number.”

“You want the fucking number? Why do you want the fucking number?”

“He owes me money.”

This seemed to make sense to her. She grimaced and spat out the number. I quickly wrote it down.

“Now you can fuck me,” she said.

“I’m not charging you for the massage, but I would have to charge you for the happy ending.”

She sat up and stared at me. “What?”

“I said I’m not going to fuck you, but I can get you off. That’s out of bounds of the normal massage, though. I’ll have to charge you.”

At that she laughed, then reached over to her dress tossed on the chair, pulled out a wad of 10,000-yen bills, and threw them at me.

“Here’s your money, greedy boy. Now get me off. I want to come.”

I have long fingers, a gift from birth. I fingered her to orgasm.

And then she was out like a light. I tucked her in, folded her clothes, and scooped up the money. I might have considered having sex with her under other circumstances. If I hadn’t gotten the

number and I thought it would have gotten me the number, I would have done it. I considered that for a second and was a little surprised. I probably would have felt guilty about it, but I would have done it.

Anyway, I had what I wanted, and I was happy. I decided that I would head back to the apartment and see Beni and Sunao before I went to work. Maybe we could eat breakfast together. I caught a taxi and told the driver to take me home. Well, I thought I told him to take me home, but instead I asked him to drive me to TMPD headquarters. It was only when I pulled up in front that it hit me—wrong place—and by then I didn't feel like getting back in the cab.

Well, it felt more like home than home did these days. On the bright side, I knew I wouldn't wake anyone up. I took the elevator to the press club, got my clothes out of my locker, took a shower, and crashed in the tatami room in the back of the club. I was almost glad I'd made the mistake.

I had Slick's number from reporting on Lucie Blackman. But before I interviewed him, I wanted him to dig his own grave. I got one of the bar girls at Dispario to call him. This is a transcript of the tape:

"Hi. Is this Slick?"

"This is Slick speaking."

"My name is Cindy Semenara. I'm looking for a job as a hostess or an escort, and a friend told me you would be a good person to talk to."

"If you want to interview, come to interview. Where are you from?"

"I'm from Canada."

"Okay."

"Where should I have an interview with you?"

"Where are you now?"

"I'm in Roppongi. What kind of jobs do you have available?"

"I'm in Roppongi too. How about seven or eight o'clock?"

"I'm not really sure what kinds of jobs are available."

“How about a club or something? A nightclub.”

“Well, I was wondering if you have any hostess jobs?”

“Yeah, sure. Hostess job, sure. Maybe you can work in bar. If you want interview, come to interview.”

“I’d really like to know what kind of club.”

“Gentlemen’s club. My club. No problem. Very near. My club is eleven years old. It’s really cool. How did you get my telephone number?”

“My friend Anna used to work at your club, or maybe it was someone else’s club. She told me to call Viktor too. But I don’t have a proper visa. I just have a tourist visa. Is that okay?”

“No problem. I will take care of everything. No problem.”

“I have experience as an escort in Canada.”

“I have that job too.”

“That’s what I’m really looking for.”

“Where are you now?”

“Near the ANA Hotel.”

“Do you know the Almond Café? Can you come there?”

“I also heard that there was a cruise job in the Maldives. I wouldn’t mind something like that.”

“Let’s meet, and we discuss. How about one hour from now?”

“What is the pay? How much do I get paid?”

“Which job?”

“How about for the escorting?”

“If you are good, I think one and a half million yen [$15,000] a month.”

“Is it hand jobs or blow jobs or—”

“Everything, everything.”

“Do I get to keep all my wages? Or do you take a commission?”

“We discuss later.”

“I just want to get an idea.”

“If you are really excellent, you can make two to three million yen [$20,000 to $30,000] a month. It is possible.”

“Do you supply housing?”

“I have a new product coming. A new bar.”

“Can you give me housing? I live in a really small place right now.”

“We have housing. We give you housing.”

“Can I get an entertainer’s visa or working visa?”

“I don’t think so.”

“It sounds pretty good so far. Is it really okay to work on a tourist visa?”

“No problem. No problem.”

“Is prostitution legal here?”

“[Laughs] I don’t want to speak on phone. We meet, and we discuss. When you come to Almond Café, call me and I come. Within one hour.”

To some extent, my face was already known in Roppongi. Slick probably wouldn’t remember me, but just to be sure I gave the tape to Matchie, a junior reporter, and asked him to interview Slick for the article. I didn’t think Matchie would be in any danger. I don’t mind danger myself, I just thought that this was the best strategy. But Matchie lacked vigor. With what he brought back, the article would be dead in the water. I threw discretion to the wind, and for the follow-up I went with Matchie to see Slick.

We met at Club Katy: nice Art Deco interior, black marble tables, view of Tokyo Tower. Since the time he’d spoken to Matchie, Slick had thought out his story, refined it. He was actually charming in his laid-back way. I expected evil incarnate; I got Goebbels instead.

“Viktor only takes their passports to make them live to their promises,” he started off.

His English was a little off, but you got the picture. Then, switching to Japanese, he admitted to, once or twice, having held on to a passport for a few days after receiving it from Viktor, an acquaintance he said he had known for eight years. “All the girls were told from the start that they would be working at a sex parlor when they came to Japan. As for Veronika,[2*] they were the

conditions laid out for her, but she refused to work as she promised. She was never deceived."

Yes, he and his cohorts recruited girls via the Internet, even on www.jobsinjapan.com, and through an underground network sent them to Japan. "I had an agent in Germany ask me to find jobs for women who were willing to work as prostitutes," he said casually.

He didn't seem on the defensive at all. He was talking to me, but he wasn't addressing me. He was trying to convince Matchie, his countryman, that he was just a misunderstood businessman, that the whole situation had been misrepresented.

"Viktor's version of events is totally different," I interjected, not entirely truthfully. "He says you're the heavy. He says you're the one who lies to the girls and takes their money. Call him if you don't believe me—here's his number." I handed him my cell phone; Viktor's number was displayed.

That threw him off balance. He cursed under his breath. He pulled on his ponytail and flared his nostrils. "Viktor is a fucking liar," he finally said in British-accented English, gritting his teeth.

He decided to talk. By the time he was done, we had enough for the article. We had him admitting to stealing the passports, to occasional coercion, to being a pimp to foreign women, and to breaking Japanese laws.

The article ran in the morning edition of the paper on February 8, 2004. The reaction around the *Yomiuri* was good, in a way, and I was jazzed. Naively, I expected something would happen—maybe even justice.

What the hell was I thinking? Did I really believe that the TMPD would swoop down on Slick and Viktor, close their operations, and liberate the women?

Slim, the near-retirement-age detective in charge of the newly formed Organized Crime Control Division 1, which dealt mostly

with illegal marriages and illegal immigration schemes, called me. He'd read the story, and he wanted to talk.

Excited, I gathered my files, my data, my notes, my telephone numbers, and got to Slim's office by ten in the morning.

He was very cordial. "Good work, Jake. A very interesting article."

"Thank you," I said, pleased with myself. "So, are you going after those jerks?"

"I'd like to. Do you think you can get one of the women to come forward and talk to me?"

"I think I can. But you'll protect her, right?"

"No, I'm afraid we'll have to arrest her for working illegally on a tourist visa and deport her. But with her testimony we can bust the two guys for violations of the immigration laws and maybe some others. We can shut down their business that way."

I wasn't liking the sound of this. "Why do you have to arrest the woman? Who's going to come forward only to go to jail?"

"Well, it's the law. We have to enforce the laws."

I rifled through my files and pulled out a directive from the National Police Agency. "Look," I said, "it says here that all police in Japan are to make serious efforts to close down human trafficking operations and take care of the victims of such perpetrators."

He snorted. "Jake, that is pure NPA bullshit. It's divorced from reality. There's no way we can ignore someone working here illegally and give them shelter, even if they are victims. There are no criteria for identifying human trafficking victims. That's why it's impossible to build a case against the traffickers. The victims are classified as illegal workers and forcibly repatriated. There are no witnesses, and therefore no cases can be built. If we did not arrest one of the women deceived into working for those people, that would be negligence of duty."

Potentially I could save a whole crew of women from being exploited, but I'd have to rat out my sources, including Helena. I'd

have to sacrifice them. I couldn't do it. Angry and depressed, I gave him Viktor's and Slick's numbers and gathered up my things, readying to split the joint.

Slim leaned forward and very quietly said to me, "I realize that you find this state of affairs appalling. So do I. It is like slavery. However, since it is prostitution, it's not really in our jurisdiction. I can only handle it in terms of illegal immigration or as a violation of the labor laws for foreigners, depending on what kind of visa these women have. Human trafficking falls into a gray zone. I suggest you talk to the chief of vice."

I went to see the head of the vice squad. He had a copy of my article on his desk. He was a short fellow with curly hair, square frameless glasses, and a booming voice. I always thought of him as Curly.

"Adelstein, nice work. You should be a cop."

"Thanks. What do you think? Are you going to bust these guys?"

He sucked air through his teeth, making the *sssa* sound that older Japanese men often make when asked a perplexing question that they don't want to answer. "It kind of seems like an immigration thing. Did you talk to O.C. Control Division 1?"

"They said if it's prostitution, it's your beat."

"Really?"

"Yes."

Curly picked up my article and read it over.

"Jake, we cover a lot of ground on the vice squad. Drugs, guns, pachinko, licensing legitimate sex shops, busting illegitimate ones, things like that. It's obvious that whether coerced or not, we've got a prostitution operation going on here. Are any of the girls teenagers?"

"Not that I know of."

"Okay, that makes it hard for the child protection squad to take the case. Just asking."

“Your point being?”

“Well, tell me what you have, and we can try and work it as a violation of the prostitution laws case, but it’ll take time and the penalties are a slap on the wrist for the accused, even if we get a conviction.”

“Okay.”

“And here’s the other thing … the prostitutes—they’re all foreigners, right?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we don’t have many officers in our section who can handle foreign languages. So that means we’ll have to ask the Criminal Investigative Division’s International Crime Unit for backup. Frankly, they’re not eager to help out on a low-level prostitution bust.”

“So you’re saying you can’t do anything.”

“No, I’m saying it’s going to take a lot of time. Logistically. There are budget issues. People issues. Language issues.”

“Well, I can give you what I have.”

“I’ll take it. I may not be able to do anything with it.”

“There’s clearly criminal activity going on.”

“There’s clearly criminal activity going on all over the fucking place. We only have the manpower to make a few token arrests and keep people in line. We’ll do it. It’s just not a simple case for us to handle.”

And that was that.

For the first time, I was very disillusioned with the cops. I know that they can only enforce laws that exist, but I wanted them to do something anyway.

Viktor continued to bring in women. Slick continued to make money. A couple of clubs dropped their services after the article. Some people stayed away from the Maldives trips, but nothing really changed. Helena was not happy with me. I was not happy

with me. I was so mad and frustrated that I took everything I had on the whole debacle and gave it to a State Department contact at the U.S. Embassy. I figured at the very least that it might be good cannon fodder for the annual white paper on human trafficking.

I made sure the article was translated into English properly, and I was happy to see that it spread across the Internet fairly rapidly. I heard that Viktor began to have trouble recruiting women.

I was really delighted when in June that year the U.S. State Department put Japan on a watch list of countries doing a piss-poor job of addressing human trafficking problems. In terms of willingness to act, Japan was ranked only slightly above North Korea. For the Japanese, that was like pushing a button. Never underestimate the power of national humiliation to make the Japanese government get off its lazy ass.

I felt gratified in another sense: when the U.S. Embassy held a symposium on human trafficking at the United Nations University later that month, I was invited to be a panelist. Not a journalist, but a participant. I felt honored.

At the conference, the National Police Agency representative gave a speech outlining the amazing things Japan had done to combat human trafficking. I couldn't resist raising my hand during the Q&A, and I went on a tirade. I related my experience dealing with the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, and then, using as an example the same roadblocks thrown in my face, I proceeded to explain why the NPA directive was a worthless piece of self-serving crap. The questions after my questions were only slightly less brutal.

The next morning, my article on the conference came out with the headline "Japan: Kingdom of Human Trafficking? American Wants Japan to Criminalize Human Trafficking." Normally, you know, reporters don't get to choose their headlines, but I'd taken extra care to make sure that I got the headline I wanted. I only had to buy an 8,000-yen bottle of sake for one of the guys in layout.

When I got to the conference that day, a trio of irate Japanese bureaucrats stood waiting for me. One was from the NPA, one from

the Ministry of Justice, and one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The MOFA official was a woman, and it was obvious she had been picked to do the honors because she could speak English. While the others stood behind her, she waved the newspaper in front of my face. “This headline is inexcusable,” she said, forgetting herself and speaking to me in Japanese.

I took the paper from her and studied the headline. “You’re right,” I said. “This headline should have been corrected. The question mark after ‘Japan: A Kingdom of Human Trafficking’ should be an exclamation point. And the part about the American is unimportant. The whole headline should read ‘Japan: Kingdom of Human Trafficking! As Bad as North Korea?”

I was on a roll. Even though it was tough, I had found a cause I could really fight for. There’s a certain charge and power derived from being on a crusade. Self-righteous anger can really motivate you. I had done some things I wasn’t proud of, but compared to the flesh traders I was writing about, I was the Dalai Lama, at least in my mind.

And I was angry. I was angry that, although human trafficking was rampant in the country at the time, the Japanese police and the Japanese government didn’t care and didn’t want to deal with it. I can’t really blame the police that much. The laws are the laws, and without any real anti–human trafficking ordinances on the books, what were they supposed to do? The problem didn’t start with the cops; it started way above them.

I was thinking like a good yakuza-busting cop investigating a gangland shooting. Who cares about the shooter? The shooter is just following orders. If you want to have an impact, bust the person who ordered the shooting.

I decided to bust the Japanese government as far as I could.

The crime in this case was indifference to and tacit approval of the exploitation of foreign women. I needed evidence to prove my case. I had some in mind. The U.N.-backed International Labor

Organization (ILO) had carried out a study, funded by the Japanese government, on the state of human trafficking in Japan. The report was scathing: Japan had failed to punish human traffickers or to take care of the victims. The Japanese government ordered the ILO to keep the report under wraps; it would never be published.

I knew it existed, however, and through certain channels I got a copy. It was the *Yomiuri's* front-page story on November 19, 2004. I had to fight to get it decent coverage, but it was worth it. I followed up with another article the next day. My source told me that the government had been preparing to announce a plan of action for dealing with human trafficking and that my article had spurred drastic revisions to strengthen protection of the victims. I felt that as a reporter I'd finally done something that made a difference, however small it might be.

I didn't give up on getting Viktor and Slick put down. Eventually, both went to jail. The drug squad had taken an interest in Slick, his clubs were raided, and he went out of business. Someone fed enough information to both Japanese Customs officials and the Dutch police about Viktor's enterprises that Viktor wound up behind bars. Apparently, someone also gave his name to the local yakuza, who beat the crap out of him for infringing on their turf.

I had made a difference. No, I should rephrase that. Helena and I had made a difference. She had had the bravery to contact me and had worked harder than I on the first story, and if there had been any justice, her name would have been on it as well.

In the end, the sex tours to the Maldives stopped. Slick's clubs were raided and shut down. Justice was served, more or less.

Something happened to me in the course of working on the human-trafficking stories. I couldn't tell you when it happened or even why. I wasn't very good at talking to the victims and keeping my distance. Their stories stuck in my head. There were images that rattled around as well. The skinny, toothless six-year-old boy of a Thai sex worker. She wasn't allowed to get dental care for her son,

because the traffickers didn't want the authorities to realize that they were both in Japan illegally.

The Korean woman who had been brutally beaten by a customer, cigarettes stubbed out on her breasts. The man who had done it, probably a low-ranking yakuza, had also given her AIDS and a child. She felt that God had cursed her. I found it hard to disagree with that.

There was the Estonian woman who had been sodomized with a sake bottle for spitting on a customer, so savagely that she required surgery. And there were more.

And in almost all cases, the women would never know who had victimized them, where they had been held, or the names of the Japanese people involved. They had memories of their suffering but rarely anything useful that could lead you to find the people responsible. It was like fighting *yurei* (ghosts and phantoms). Most of the time, the women were forcibly deported for visa violations immediately after the sex club owners were arrested, thus leaving no evidence for prosecution on other charges. I tried to convince the cops that they should be arresting the traffickers for kidnapping, rape, assault, and any other charges that were possible, but the cops would tell me, "In order to do that we'd need evidence and these women are poor witnesses because they don't understand Japanese and can't give solid testimony. In addition to this, they have been working illegally in Japan, which is a crime, and they have to be deported. Once they're deported, it's hard to build a criminal case."

It was like a Zen Buddhist *mondo*. I kept having that same conversation with law enforcement. I knew that if the laws were changed, things would change, but it didn't seem as if that would ever happen.

I'd cultivated various sources in order to get to talk to the victims, but try as I might I could never find out much about the victimizers. I didn't have the resources or the money to do that. I started spending huge amounts of my pay on helping the women I met.

Sometimes, that meant taking them to some place where they could get an abortion, off the books.

I didn't know how I felt about abortion, but I know that I believed that no woman should have to bear the child of the man who'd raped her or bought her unwilling services. Sometimes I'd cough up airfare. I did what I could. And, of course, I was breaking all the rules of objectivity. *Don't get involved*. I got involved.

Over time, I lost interest in sex. It seemed a vulgar, nasty, and brutish thing. Everything about it seemed vaguely unpleasant. I wasn't impotent, I just wasn't interested. Chronic fatigue didn't help either.

I should have talked about all these things with my wife, but I didn't. When could I? I was never home. I called the house at night and said good night to the kids. I tried to e-mail her during the day but often forgot to do it. I was becoming distant. I observed it happening as if I were watching someone else. I might have been able to explain why to her, but I didn't want to. She didn't seem interested in my work, and I stopped talking about it. We argued. She accused me of spending too much money on booze, and I didn't want to say I'd been giving it away to women she didn't know. Why? I was afraid she'd tell me to stop doing it. She probably would not have done that. She probably would have been supportive. I just didn't give her a chance.

When lying is part of your job, you forget how love is supposed to work.

I started sleeping in the back room of the house when I came home late. We shared the bedroom with our children, so that made intimacy difficult as well. We didn't even really have a bedroom, just a tatami living room where we put out our futons.

Even when I got home early, which was rare, I began to make excuses for sleeping in the back room. I felt better there. I didn't like to be touched when I slept anymore.

I knew that I was burning out. When my parents talked to me they noticed that I was always distracted. I began to think about

calling it quits and going home. I decided that that would be a good thing to do, the smart thing to do. The best choice for myself, our marriage, and the children.

1* This was the same Slick I'd met when covering the Lucie Blackman murder.

2* I made sure that Veronika had left the country and was safe before interviewing Slick.

Ten Thousand and One Cigarettes

Sometimes I'm surprised at how often I find myself right back where I started.

"Here's a box of the finest tobacco money can buy," I said when Sekiguchi opened the door, lifting up the DUTY FREE bag. He was surprised to see me—after all, I wasn't even supposed to be in Japan. He didn't seem to mind much, either. I showed up unannounced at his house around five in the afternoon in January 2006; he was the only one home—and at a decent hour, which was rare.

He did a sort of double-take and then yelled, "Jake! Happy New Year!"

"Happy New Year! I thought I'd hand-deliver this year's New Year's card." I handed it to him. There we were, all of us on the card, goofy pictures of Beni and Ray, my son. Sunao and I looked at peace in the photo as well. We had put greetings in both Japanese and English on the card. It was probably one of the first times in years I'd actually been able to sit down and make a proper card.

Sekiguchi was amused at our six-sided faux Japanese house in the photos.

"Thanks for the card, but have you ever heard of stamps? Or is this something you barbarians in the Midwest don't know about? Come on in. The wife and kids are out shopping, they'll be back in an hour."

I took off my shoes in the entrance, lined them up facing toward the door, and stepped into the house, saying the obligatory Japanese phrase *"Ojama shimasu"* (I will honorably now bother you).

As I hung up my umbrella on the coat rack, he looked at my feet.

“Your socks don’t match today. I’m assuming that Sunao and the kids are back in America, right?”

I laughed. As usual, his detective skills were top notch.

He thanked me for the carton of cigarettes. They weren’t his brand, but they were Premium Mild Sevens—limited edition kind of things. He pulled out an ashtray that was remarkably clean.

He took out a pack and looked at it longingly, shrugged his shoulders, and opened it. I retrieved my pack, the clove cigarettes. He lit mine for me, and I lit his for him.

Sekiguchi wrinkled his face a little at the smell of the clove tobacco, “Those things smell like incense every time. You know … I’m not dead yet.” He inhaled deeply on his own coffin nail.

“What does that mean?”

“Weren’t you a little monk once? Incense is for funerals. You don’t have to smoke one now; you can light one for me then. No need to rush. You’ll have a chance soon enough.”

“Is it that bad?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m home early because I had chemo yesterday. I was too sick to work. I go in almost every day, though. What else am I going to do? Play golf? The doctors say I’ve got a year, maybe two years left.”

Sekiguchi’s cancer had spread. It had started in his appendix, of all places, and metastasized quickly. There had been a period when it had seemed as though he might have been cured, but it was still there festering away out of reach and beyond detection. When they caught it the second time, it was way too late.

If Sekiguchi had been Tadamasa Goto, the powerful gangster, he would have been getting the best medical care in the world. Several doctors would have been analyzing his charts, checking his vitals, and mapping his progress every day, every night. He’d have a hospital suite to himself at Tokyo University Hospital. But he wasn’t Tadamasa Goto, he was just a low-ranking cop who’d never made it past sergeant, and he didn’t have much money.

He couldn't afford to stay home and get better. He had to go to work every day. The cost of not dying was expensive, even in Japan.

"You know, I finally quit smoking. A little late but I did."

"Sorry. Shouldn't have brought these."

"Nahh, one last smoke with you. Seems like a good thing to do. Even with these shitty premium cigarettes. Maybe I'll smoke one of yours."

"Be my guest." I offered him one.

He took it in his fingers, tapped it gently on the table, looked it up and down, lit it—twice; they're hard to light—and inhaled.

"Sweet. I can feel that nicotine burst. Not bad, not bad at all. Now, while I'm smoking this thing, bring me up to date. You better have a good reason for being back in Japan, or I'm going to have to kick your ass—something I never thought I'd have to do. I don't think coming back so soon is a good idea."

He was right. He was almost always right. He'd been right when we'd been sitting at the hotel in Shinjuku having such a lovely talk with Goto's ambassadors a few months before. A lot had changed since then. I had officially resigned from the *Yomiuri Shinbun* in November 2005, about a month after Goto's emissaries had made their threats.

In my mind, the Goto article was going to be my last scoop, my graduation thesis. It hadn't worked out, and I didn't plan to stick around for one more article that I couldn't see getting published in the first place. The *Yomiuri* let me take most of my unused vacation time and sent me on my way. I had liked working for the *Yomiuri*, but by the start of 2005 the human trafficking stories had taken their toll, and my unpleaseant meeting with Goto's enforcers was enough to send me packing. The *Yomiuri* was very understanding during the whole process and let me stay in the company insurance plan even after I left.

After resigning, I returned home to the Midwest. I had enrolled in an LSAT preparation course and was getting ready for law school. I

was diligently trying to make the transition to a new way of life. No cigarettes. No drinking until three in the morning. No friends calling after midnight. No yakuza cops or strippers or prostitutes to hang out with. Nothing more dangerous around than a lawn mower.

And then I got an e-mail from a good buddy, Ken, who used to work for the CIA. The U.S. State Department was sponsoring a massive study of human trafficking in Japan. He said he had recommended me for the job and wanted to know if I was interested. I read the e-mail several times.

I thought about it. I had cleared up things with Goto, ostensibly. I had a peace treaty of sorts. I wouldn't want to bring my family, though. I didn't trust those guys. The job sounded good; the remuneration not bad. It could do some good in the world. I might be able to do a lot more with the proper funding. However, taking the job would put me right back into the world of depravity that I had left behind.

I thought about my plans for law school. I thought about my promises to Sunao. And then, without consulting anyone, I replied, "Yes. I'd love to take the job."

I felt as if it would be wrong to say no. It felt like a duty and an obligation. Maybe I should have seen it as a temptation instead.

And so, before the year even ended, I found myself back in Japan, revisiting the same places I'd spent so much time before. I needed to see Sekiguchi. I think I wanted his approval more than his advice.

I brought him up to date. He was satisfied with my answers.

"You have a friend who used to be CIA? Always thought there was a little more to you than your goofy appearance. But every time I talk to you, I think 'probably not.' Well, it's good work to be doing. And it's important. And the pay sounds good. You're going to keep the family in the States while you do this, right?"

"Of course."

"Good. Because it's dangerous stuff you're doing. Let me tell you something about reporting about the yakuza. You can write all you

want about their gang wars, their tattoos, their sexual exploits, but when you start looking into how they really make their money, what companies they own—you're walking into scary territory. And make no mistake, human trafficking is a source of revenue for these guys. Child porn. Prostitution. Anything where the profits are high. It's all about the money with these guys now, and that kind of reporting threatens to screw up their business."

I had a question. I wanted to know if my "truce" with Goto would hold.

"I'm pretty sure he knows you quit the *Yomiuri*. Correction. I'm definitely sure he knows. So as far as he's concerned, you're an ex-reporter. What you're doing now, as long as he doesn't know about it, is fine. But you should be extra careful. Tokyo is his turf. You'll be walking around his playground without permission. If you're going to ask around for that report, be very, very careful. Be careful who you call, who you meet, what you say. Got it?"

I nodded that I understood. Sekiguchi didn't look so good, and I didn't want to add to his worries. While we were chatting, Mrs. Sekiguchi came home and so did the girls, both of them now in their teens with crazy haircuts. It was hard to compute.

They both gave me a hug, and we chatted for a while. Mrs. Sekiguchi made us all yakisoba and then massaged Sekiguchi's legs, which were as stiff as boards, some kind of side effect from the chemotherapy. He had me knock on them; it was just like hitting wood.

I stayed for an hour and then called a taxi. Sekiguchi walked me to the door himself and motioned for his wife and the kids to stay back. It wasn't the usual all-family bye-bye.

It was pitch-black in Konan, and the only area of light was the wide circle in front of the porch. It was like looking into space from where we stood. Sekiguchi-san gave me back the carton of cigarettes and the opened pack, saying, "Thanks, but this is enough for a while. I appreciate the thought."

"Understood. I wish I could do something more."

He shook his head and waved his hands as if to say, Not needed.

“Jake, I’ve known you for a decade now. Pretty amazing, huh? You’ve come a long way since you were a naive little cub reporter. I’m proud to know you. I think you’re doing the right thing, but you better know where you’re going with this, okay? Watch your back. And look out for the people you care for. You start looking into this sexual slavery thing—I forget the fancy word—you’ll step on a lot of toes. Sometimes people step back. You keep in touch.”

He patted me hard on the shoulder, waited for me to get into the taxi, and waved good-bye. He made a gentle bow as I was about to take off, and the kids and Mrs. Sekiguchi came out to the porch and waved.

I appreciated the sentiment, but I was no longer a newbie reporter who didn’t know the difference between purse snatching and armed robbery. I knew what I was doing. At least I thought I did.

Back on the Beat

It's hard to think when you can't breathe. It's even harder to think when you can't breathe because a yakuza bruiser has you pinned against the wall, with one hand around your neck and the other hand punching your ribs, and your feet are dangling off the floor.

Still, you would be surprised at how quickly sundry thoughts pass through your head.

I was in the entranceway of what was being called a "Russian pub," the hottest thing in human trafficking at the time in Tokyo. The women were brought over from Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere, allegedly to work as hostesses, and quickly turned over to yakuza groups, which put them to work as indentured prostitutes.

This club was on the third floor of a four-story building in Ikebukuro, an area that means literally "pond bag." The area lives up to its name. The club was called Moscow Mule.

It was one of the newer clubs. I'd heard about it from Helena and went to check it out. Like most clubs trafficking in foreign women, it was off limits to foreigners. The problem with foreigners is that they feel sorry for the other foreigners working in the clubs—and they tell the police or the NGOs about it.

If I spoke softly, killed all emotion in my voice, and wore a suit and thick, black-rimmed glasses, I could sometimes pass for a Japanese person in extremely low light. I'd talked my way into the club. But the woman I was interviewing began to break down and cry, which quickly blew my cover.

The eight-fingered, badly tattooed, pock-faced giant bouncer at the door must have picked up on it, because he grabbed me and pulled me outside and into the entranceway, where he started

beating the shit out of me. I wasn't holding my own very well. In fact, I was thinking that I would probably be dead very soon and that this wasn't how I wanted to check out of the world. Unlike an Apache warrior, I always wake up thinking to myself, "Today is a good day not to die."

Much as in my early days, I was still a terrible martial artist. Even though I had since studied both karate and aikido, I had no talent for forms or kata or anything at all. The highest compliment my karate teacher ever gave me was "You do everything wrong, your stance is awful, your form is terrible, and your movements are sloppy—but often, because you grasp the underlying principles, what you do … it works. It baffles me."

I didn't really have much time to think about what wonderful esoteric wrist lock would get my opponent's hands off my neck so I could breathe. It was while I was thinking about breathing that I recalled what my old aikido teacher, who was a cop, had once told me was the most effective aikido move of all. It's effective because even the biggest man in the world can't survive without taking in oxygen.

I stiffened my fingers and jabbed him repeatedly in the little indentation under the larynx as hard as I could, rapid-fire. It was basic *atemi*. There was a nice tactile sensation of puncturing fleshy tissue, and he fell back. Now I could breathe.

He couldn't breathe; he started gagging and fell to his knees. While he was down there I curled my hands into half shells and smash-clapped them over both of his ears as hard as I could. This is called *happa-ken*, or "the rupturing fist." In theory, it's supposed to break a person's eardrums, throw off their balance, induce nausea, and cause him great pain. In practice, it seemed to work.

He moaned and rocked back. I kicked him in the face and then ran out of the place as fast as I could and kept running all the way to Ike-bukuro station, where I hopped into a cab and told the driver to take me to Roppongi. It was only after I sat in the back of the cab and took a deep breath that I realized how much my frigging ribs

hurt. I thought my hands were covered with sweat and blood, and then I realized that it was the pomade from the slicked-back hair of the bouncer. It had a fruity, medicinelike scent to it. Probably Mandom pomade.

I didn't think about calling the cops. Maybe I could claim to have been defending myself, but I feared I might have overdone it. And I was a foreigner, which meant that in nine out of ten cases, I was presumed guilty until proven guilty. I wasn't excited about the prospect of possibly going to jail. And though I once might have had the protection of the mighty *Yomiuri* in case of a dispute, now I was a nobody, a man without a business card or a normal job. I was now just a nonentity, a former journalist working for a foreign government in Japan as an investigator and with no real backup. Yes, maybe a little dangerous, but I felt it was a worthy cause. Good versus evil. I was the good guy. I'd just be more careful.

The next day I called a friend in the drug squad. I'd seen some girls snorting cocaine or meth in the back at the urging of their manager, so I knew there were drugs there. The woman I'd talked to said that all she wanted to do was go home. I figured that one way or another, that would get her home. I didn't really know what else to do.

What had saved my ribs was a *boha* vest. An antiknifing vest. If you're going to get killed in Japan, you're more likely to be stabbed to death than shot. The penalties for using a gun in a crime are steep; this encourages people to use knives. In recent years, the penalties for using a gun have gotten a lot steeper. It's a crime to own one, another crime to fire it, and an aggravating factor if you wound or kill someone with a firearm. This has brought about a revival of the Japanese sword as a weapon of choice among the yakuza, which was why I wore a boha vest.

The research was going well. The job was to not track the victims but to track the victimizers—to map out the whole sex slavery industry or capture a detailed microcosm of it. I was supposed to find out how the women were brought into the country, who brought them in, who profited from the business, and which

politicians and bureaucrats were aiding and abetting the human traffickers. I got an ex–immigration official to give me the name of a Japanese senator, Koki Kobayashi, who had personally pressured him to stop raiding the illegal sex clubs. I had the name of what was considered a human-trafficking lobby, Zengeiren—which held its annual meetings at the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) headquarters. Mind-blowing stuff.

Not a lot of time had passed since I'd been a police reporter, and my information network was still in good shape. Of course, I'd need some help to do the job. I called Helena and invited her out to dinner, having heard she had broken up with her fiancé and was a little depressed. I didn't just want some help, I wanted to cheer her up as well. I missed her, too. There was a great Japanese restaurant in the Nishi-Azabu area with semiprivate rooms, well lit and quiet. We were supposed to meet in front.

I waited outside by the steps, and she almost ran me over on her motorcycle. I had to step back. She parked, straddling the bike, took off her helmet, and shook out her long hair, stretching her neck and laughing. She had on her standard leather jacket, a pair of tight-fitting blue jeans, and a checkered shirt that looked as if it had been stolen off a thin lumberjack. Her lipstick was jet black. She looked great—a little tired but still great.

"Well, asshole, long time, no see."

"Asshole? You can't possibly be talking to me."

"You're the only asshole here, asshole. And you know that I mean that as a term of endearment, Jake."

"I do indeed."

Somehow she convinced me to go for a ride on her bike. A few times during my reporter days she'd driven me home and I'd found I could barely stand after getting off the bike, I'd been hugging the bike with my legs so hard. I got on, and she told me to put my arms

around her waist. She took the helmet and tossed it into the bushes near the restaurant. I protested.

“Live life to the fullest, Jake. This’ll be good for you. Trust me!”

She revved up the engine and before she let go of the brake, she looked over her shoulder and said, “Nice to see you back. I knew you couldn’t stay away for long.”

Then we were off. I think she enjoyed the incredible discomfort that I had riding that thing. She’d whisk through alleys, run lights, spin around—and I had no idea where she was going.

It was a cold night, but it felt good to be on the back of that bike. We drove around aimlessly for twenty minutes, past the ruins of the Ministry of Defense and then down Roppongi-dori and then finally back to the restaurant.

She hopped off the bike in one quick movement. I peeled myself off it.

She smiled at me and grabbed her helmet, and without a word we walked up the stairs to get dinner. I filled her in on what I was doing and how my plans to move back home hadn’t really worked out. We talked about mutual friends. I told her about the research I was doing, and she talked about her own work.

She still wasn’t ashamed of her job. She spoke about it as I would talk tradecraft with my Japanese newspaper reporter friends. It turned out that one of her regulars was actually a fellow reporter whom I knew superficially.

“Don’t you get sick of the work?” I’d always wanted to ask her about that; it seemed to me that she could do so much more with herself.

“You know, I like the work. I tried being an English teacher, which pays all right, but I hate that work. Especially dealing with obsessive grammarians. What’s the past perfect imperative tense? Who gives a fuck, you know? I realized when I took the money the first time for sex that I’d much rather make a living on my back than

standing up. Fifty thousand yen—I could work as an English teacher for three eight-hour days and still not clear that."

It was true.

"Adelstein," she told me, tapping me on the head with the chopsticks so I would pay attention, "you work your ass off for chump change. I get paid a hundred dollars a minute. You know why?"

"I have no idea."

"Because most Japanese guys last two minutes. Maybe it's because the big gaijin woman in front of them freaks them out. I don't know. They're in and they're done before you even realize it. The ones that drive you crazy are the guys who just want to talk. Like this guy from NHK. He never wants to just do it. I wish he would because when he doesn't, I have to be like nursemaid and psychiatrist and English teacher. What I'm really thinking while I'm listening to him talk on and on is 'Dammit, let's just fuck so I can be done with it and get you out of here.' Sometimes, I just can't deal with it and I unzip the guy, pull out his dick, and suck him off. Most men shut up when you're sucking their dick. Probably even you, and you almost never shut up."

I laughed at that. "You're right. In terms of pay by the minute, my job can't touch yours. But doesn't it depress you a little?"

"Well, that's when cocaine comes in handy. A little blow, and I'm ready to blow."

I didn't laugh at that.

"Jesus Christ, Helena," I told her, "you're too smart to be doing that shit. What's wrong with you?"

She shrugged her shoulders, cocked her head, and batted her eyes.

"Well, it makes sex soooo much better. And work gets so boring. I need something to get me through the day. Sometimes through the night."

"Do you want to end up dead like those poor bastards last year? You remember them, the guys who thought they were buying coke

and ended up overdosing on pure heroin? You could kill yourself with that shit. You do know what I'm talking about, right?"

"I know, I know. I read the translated version of your article. You sent it to me."

I lectured her some more. I raised my voice. I was a little angry. She sulked a little, stared at the floor.

"I knew you'd be mad at me. I'm sorry."

"You don't have to apologize. Just stop taking that stuff."

"I know. I will. I will."

I changed the subject. We talked about *The Gate*, a translation of a Natsume Soseki novel I'd given her to read. She liked the book. We couldn't agree whether it had a happy ending or not. She asked me back to her place for a nightcap. It sounded like a good idea to me.

She was living near Shibuya. I made her promise me that she would drive safely. She nodded her head and said in a very singsongy way, "I cross my heart and hope to die, if I should chance to tell a lie. I will be the model driver."

I guess I should have defined "model driver" before getting back on. By Indy 500 standards, she was probably telling the truth.

When we got to her place, she put a Death Cab for Cutie album on her stereo and we sat down on the couch to talk. She lit some candles, poured some good Australian red wine into coffee cups, and brought it over to me. She put her legs over mine and leaned on me, and I didn't mind at all. I put my arm around her shoulder and felt very content. For the length of a whole song, we just stayed that way. It was one of the few moments in the last few years of my life that I'd really felt at peace with the world.

"Tell me something, how are you really doing, Helena? I heard you split up with your fiancé. What happened? Do you want to talk about it?"

"Fuck, no. Fuck that motherfucking cocksucker asshole."

"You have a foul mouth."

“You have no idea. If you’re really nice, I’ll let you know just how dirty my mouth really is, and believe me, you won’t regret it.”

“I think you want to talk about it. I’m willing to listen if you can stop being a smartass for five minutes.”

“Are you sure that’s okay?”

“Sure.”

She told me what had happened. She’d been dating Carl, who was a trader at one of the foreign companies that had set up offices in Japan. He was good-looking, liked to windsurf. I didn’t know much about him except that I had met him once. He’d really seemed to be fond of her. They had been engaged for a while.

Carl had become suspicious after finding the card of the sex club where she worked inside her wallet. He’d asked one of his Japanese colleagues to check the club out. He couldn’t go himself because no foreigners were allowed.

“Well”—Helena had trouble getting to this part—“his Japanese buddy came to the club, and he fucked me. And he tape-recorded the whole thing. Isn’t that just so damn sick? I mean, what a perverted thing to have done. I was so fucking humiliated. You think that Carl would have figured it out without having to sneak around behind my back like that. Where did he think the money for our trips to Bali was coming from? I was the one paying. You can’t pay for a luxury resort on an English teacher’s salary.”

“So what happened?”

“I got home from work one night, and he was waiting for me. Outside the apartment. He was smiling and normal at first. I didn’t know anything, and then he says, ‘Oh, I have something you should hear,’ and then he puts the tape in the stereo and plays it. Christ, it was so fucking awful. I tried to explain.”

She stopped and gulped down a cupful of wine. I poured her another. She looked away from me and at the wall.

“He was really angry. He called me a lot of terrible things, and then he hit me. A few times. Finally he pushed me on the bed and

pulled up my skirt, pulled down my panties, and fucked me, calling me a whore the whole time. He came and he went. And that was that."

I knew the answer to what I was going to ask, but I choked on the question a little and she stopped me in midsentence.

"Well, I didn't really have time to fill out the consent form—it kind of sucked." She was starting to cry a little but laughing through the tears. "You know, he was sobbing part of the time, too. What a pussy! I think he really loved me. I cried too. It hurt. It hurt a lot."

There's a time to just shut up. Usually, I talk anyway, but this time I shut up. I hugged her a little closer, and I stroked her hair and held her hand. The CD had stopped playing, and all I could hear was the traffic passing outside and Helena crying very quietly, almost sheepishly. I held her for a long time.

The next day we met for coffee in Starbucks. Things seemed normal. I had some good leads, and it was time to get down to business. There was a nonprofit organization called International Entertainment Association operating out of the swanky and extremely expensive Roppongi Hills Residences apartment complex. It was supposed to be promoting international friendship; what it was actually doing was providing foreign women for the sex trade. One of the staff members had a prior for labor violations related to trafficking foreign women and prostitution. I would hardly have considered it worthy of approval for nonprofit status.

I asked Helena to look into it for me. She was well connected and knew everyone in Roppongi. I warned her to be very careful, but I don't think she really heard me. She was excited about it. She wanted to help out.

We had an awkward parting.

"Listen," I said, shaking my finger at her, "if you hear anything, great. Don't poke around too much. I don't know much about the people running this NGO other than that they are not very nice."

“I got it. I will be cautious.”

“Just ask around a little bit. If you have the slightest sense that you’re in danger or anything—cease and desist. You have my number. Call me anytime—in the United States or here.”

“I promise that I will be cautious.”

“Okay. Good.”

I asked her how much longer she planned to be in Japan. She said that she was thinking of leaving in the spring. She’d bought a home in Australia and was considering going back to college—maybe studying “literature or something equally as worthless.”

I got up and prepared to leave after giving her some materials. She tapped me on the shoulder and held out her arms, shook her butt a little.

“Do I get a hug for the road?”

“Absolutely.”

• • •

In March, she called me at home in the United States. She told me that she had been asking around and that she believed that the International Entertainment Association was a front for the Goto-gumi.

I almost dropped the phone.

I told her to stop right there, and she got upset. Perhaps she thought I was overreacting or that I thought that she was weak. She could have easily been high. I certainly accused her of that. Either way, our conversation escalated almost to an argument, and then she hung up.

I tried reaching her, but she wouldn’t answer the phone. I called all the next day. I called a friend and asked him to check on her. He promised to and he did—nobody home at her apartment. I was afraid that if I called the regular police, she’d get busted for being a

prostitute. I had to go and find her. I shouldn't have waited even a day. I bumped up my flight to Japan. Sunao was furious.

I kept e-mailing her on the long trip there. I went immediately to the place where she used to work after arriving in Narita. Except when I got there, she wasn't there. There weren't any foreign women working there at all. Her e-mail account was not responding, and her phone was dead. I went to her apartment, and the landlord said she hadn't been back in two or three days.

After a week, there wasn't any doubt that she had vanished from her apartment and her day job as an English teacher; I checked there as well. She'd provided no forwarding address and had left everything behind in the apartment.

I had no idea what to do.

I did the only thing I could think of. I went to work. International Entertainment Association was associated with the Goto-gumi, so I had to check that out, right. I had to follow up Helena's lead.

If Goto had been responsible in any way for her vanishing—and I didn't know that he had—I wanted to know. Even if he hadn't, I should have returned to work on the story about his liver transplant a long time ago. It was a diversion from the human-trafficking research but not completely off track. I knew I'd be putting myself at risk and probably pissing off Goto again, but I didn't really care very much. I'd probably already done it anyway.

As the Japanese would say, I'd already eaten the poison, might as well lick the plate.

Yakuza Confessions

I began making progress in figuring out how Goto had gotten into the United States. I had a clue and I'd developed a good source, someone who knew a lot and wanted to talk.

It was a clear, cold day in December 2006 when I went to see Masaki Shibata, an ex-yakuza, at a very nice hospital in the middle of Tokyo. Shibata was a very intelligent man. He had also been friends with the Emperor of Loan Sharks. It was a small world, after all.

I was completing the human-trafficking project, and I was doing other investigative work to keep money coming in. I worried about Helena. She'd completely disappeared.

I was commuting back and forth between the United States and Japan. The kids seemed happy in their new home and were learning English really quickly.[1*] There were adjustment problems, the biggest being that the United States doesn't have universal health insurance as Japan does. It was very hard when Beni came down with a high fever and I realized we couldn't afford to take her to the emergency room unless it was absolutely necessary. In Japan, we would have gone in the middle of the night without thinking about it. I'd never had to contemplate the costs of medical care before in my life.

Public health care in Japan can be bad, but most of the time it's good and it's better than nothing.

However, here's a strange thing about Japan: Almost any restaurant is spotless. The floors glow, the countertops are clean, the linen is a bright white. This doesn't hold true for medical facilities. Most hospitals have a thin veneer of dust on the floor; the sheets

have been washed, but stains remain. The windows look as if no one has cleaned them in decades. You have to take off your shoes and put on moldy slippers to tread through poorly lit halls with medical equipment and supplies filling the corridors.

Shibata's hospital was different. You could wear shoes. It was a clean, well-lit space. You might actually be able to eat off the dishes without fearing secondary infection.

I didn't sign the guest book. I didn't want any evidence that I'd visited the guy or that I knew him.

Shibata was a big man in his organized crime group, but he was no longer an organization man. When he'd been diagnosed with liver cancer, it flashed upon him that he'd led an evil life. You might wonder why the yakuza seem to get stricken with liver cancer. A lot of it has to do with the tattoos. Most of them got them when they were young and the needles used weren't clean. Many of them have hepatitis C, and they drink a lot. That's a pretty lethal combination. In addition to that, the traditional tattoos almost kill the sweat glands. The body can't get rid of its poisons easily, and that's also hard on the organs.

Shibata knew he wasn't going to get a liver transplant, and he decided to make his peace with the world, make amends where he could. He married a Malaysian woman who worked at one of his clubs and had a kid with her.

Fortunately, Shibata wanted to talk to someone, wanted to balance out his sins. So a Buddhist priest introduced us. *Tsumihoroboshi* is the word for it. There were, of course, conditions on what he would tell me and what I could do with the information. He knew that upon his death, terrible things would be written about him in the press. I had to promise I'd tell his son that his father had had another side, that he had tried to be a better man. I was to give his son an unopened letter.

Shibata looked pretty bad. People in the advanced stages of liver cancer have a terrible pallor. Yellowish. He wasn't quite there yet.

As the liver becomes less and less able to function, all the poisons in the body that it should be filtering out don't leave. You essentially become toxic to yourself. Some people become violent, delirious.

Before asking what you want to know as a reporter, it's always good to chew the fat a bit. I mentioned that I'd walked by the Yaesu Fujiya Hotel on my way to come see him and been reminded of the Eiju Kim murder in 2002.

He asked me if I wanted to know what had really happened. But first, I had to open the window. He wanted to smoke. I'd brought him an aluminum case of Lucky Strikes, his favorite brand, from duty free. A carton of ten. I had to stand on his bed to disconnect the smoke alarm.

I remembered the Fujiya Hotel shooting vividly. All I had to do was look down at my feet. By again playing the idiot gaijin, a role that required no method acting, I had managed to get behind the yellow police tape and right up to the corpse. The blood on the ground practically carpeted the street, it was that rich and copious. I imagined I could see steam rising faintly from the puddle. The air smelled like aluminum foil.

Even with all the blood on his clothes, it was plain that the victim, Kim, dressed well. Armani, maybe, a black pin-striped number. I'm not fashion-conscious, but I know a good suit when I see one. With a nice herringbone-patterned shirt, dark gray. Tailored to fit, clearly.

Kim was old school. I counted ten whole fingers, although the left pinkie looked suspicious. It might not have been original—it could have have been a toe taken to replace it in restorative surgery. If I took off his shoes, I would know the truth, but that would surely be pushing my luck.

I snapped a couple of pictures before a cop in panic mode grabbed my arm, lifting me off my feet, and pulled me back behind the crime

scene tape. As he was dragging me, I noticed my feet leaving a trail of blood, sort of slimy, like snail goo. I suppose one could have accused me of disrupting the integrity of the crime scene, but when someone is gunned down in front of a hotel near one of the largest train stations in the world, well, most of the damage has already been done. The shooter was in custody. I hadn't felt terribly guilty.

Shibata was still waiting while I replayed the scene in my head.

"Well, were you there?"

"Yes, I was at the scene. I saw the body."

Eiju Kim, real age unknown but probably late forties, a Japanese citizen of Korean ancestry who was head of the Osaka yakuza group Kyoyou-kai, which was part of the Yamaguchi-gumi family, got into a heated conversation with Naoto Kametani, the head of the Rokkorengo gang, also part of the Yamaguchi-gumi, in front of the Fujiya Hotel. The two of them were close friends.

Kim, who was accompanied by Kenichi Takanuki, thirty, his underling and driver, broke off the conversation and briskly got into the backseat of a large black car parked next to them. Takanuki slid behind the wheel. Kametani was left standing next to the car.

As the car was pulling into traffic, Kametani whipped out a handgun and sprayed the backseat with bullets, killing Kim instantly. The driver jumped out of the car and was shot, too. Kametani fled on foot but only got about two hundred feet before the cops, who were coincidentally hanging around, tackled him and arrested him for attempted murder. On the surface, a pretty straightforward homicide. Yet it was highly unusual: interfactional violence like that is rare.

"You want to know the real story?"

"Yeah, I'd love to."

"Okay." And then he didn't say anything. Shibata seemed lost in thought, and I reminded him that I would like to know the real story. He nodded.

Shibata inhaled deeply and happily. He held the cigarette with his left hand between his thumb and index finger, making a kind of circle, with his pinkie standing up rather delicately. And then he talked.

It was an incredible story. It involved slush funds in the Osaka prosecutor's office, media suppression, and a colossal cover-up. Still, it didn't make complete sense, kind of like conspiracy theories, which abound in Japan. I'd go into detail, but I want to live out the rest of my natural life. Still, I wanted to know more.

"Where's the proof?" I asked the wise man.

"I am the fucking proof. It's true because I say it's true," Shibata replied firmly, then stubbed his cigarette out on the windowsill. For a second, even with his pale and sunken face, I got a sense of the sheer force that had made him a wet-your-pants kind of enforcer in his day. His look was that intense.

The room got very quiet. You could hear the cigarette sizzling out.

"It still doesn't make total sense to me."

"You're the reporter, you figure it out."

"Ex-reporter."

"Yeah, yeah. It doesn't matter anyway. It's all history. Nobody gives a shit. But you didn't ever think it was funny? You never wondered why Kametani never said a word about why he did it? You never wondered why he got twenty instead of life?"

"Well, I assumed that if he'd killed a civilian, he would have gotten life."

"You sons of bitches. When yakuza kill yakuza, nobody gives a crap."

That gave me pause. "You know," I said, "I said the same thing once to a cop in Saitama, and we made a bet. I ended up taking his entire family out for Korean barbecue, and they ordered *wagyu!*[2*] You want the story?"

He nodded.

It was a couple years back, when Sekiguchi was still in good health.

On November 16, 1994, hostilities had boiled over between the Kokusui-kai and the Yamaguchi-gumi. The Kokusui-kai struck first, shooting and severely wounding two Yamaguchi-gumi soldiers who had made a visit to their office in Tokyo. The next day, the Yamaguchi-gumi retaliated, the gang war spreading across two prefectures—Saga and Yamanashi—then to Shinjuku in Tokyo, and then finally to Saitama Prefecture.

I was expecting something to happen that day, and I wasn't disappointed. I was passing time at the police press club, learning the fine points of mahjong from a senior reporter of the *Tokyo Shinbun*, when a public affairs officer ran in shouting about a shooting. A shooting of people, two people, not just office doors. I hitched a ride to the crime scene.

It was a seven-floor condominium building in the heart of Konosu. The Kokusui-kai office had a sign on its door that read TOOUTANTEISHA (Eastern and European Private Investigations). It was one of three private detective agencies in the area that were fronts for Kokusui-kai offices; they even advertised in the yellow pages.

Yakuza-looking thugs entered and left the office, shouting into their cell phones and generally ignoring the police, who were swarming into the area and roping off the entire first floor with yellow tape. You could see blood on the sidewalk but no bodies.

I snapped as many pictures as I could. One yakuza, wearing oversized sunglasses and a white velour sweatsuit, glared at me while talking into his cell. He waved his hand violently as if to say, "Don't fuckin' take my picture." I took it anyway.

That did not please him. He stomped toward me, shouting obscenities, which I couldn't understand because he was rolling his *r*'s and making that typical yakuza growl, which he must've learned from bad yakuza movies. Just as the Italian mafiosi look to Hollywood movies to model themselves, the Japanese yakuza do the

same. In fact, the yakuza usually own the studios making yakuza movies, which means that sometimes in a yakuza flick, the extras playing yakuza are actually yakuza. Conversely, the scary-looking guys in front of me were definitely not actors.

I pointed to my *Yomiuri* armband. “I’m a reporter. I have a right to take pictures.”

The subtlety of my argument did not deter him, and he grabbed for my camera.

I pulled it back beyond his reach, shaking my finger at him and going *tsk-tsk*. I dared to be so cocky because my favorite cop, Sekiguchi, had shown up on the scene. He was in black jeans, a navy blue sweater, and a long leather jacket. His hair was slicked back, and he had on leather gloves. He looked more like a yakuza than the yakuza.

As Mr. White Sweatsuit got close to punching out my lights, Sekiguchi yelled the guy’s name and told him, “Haul your fat ass outta here, and stop using the goddamn phone.” The man retreated, still glaring at me.

Sekiguchi walked over to survey the scene for bullets and whispered, “Jake, don’t push your luck. Don’t antagonize those guys. They have a poor sense of humor.” Then: “Drop by tonight.”

I nodded. we had a rule: we never spoke to each other at a crime scene. I hung around trying for a few standard quotes. A bar hostess on the second floor told me, “I knew that those people down there weren’t really detectives, but I didn’t know they were yakuza. They were very quiet until today.”

“Now that you know, are you frightened?” I asked, gently leading the witness.

“Well,” she said, dragging on a Mild Seven cigarette, “not really. It’s like lightning. It never strikes twice, right?”

A totally unusable comment.

I was able to get a retired schoolteacher from the third floor to say something more appropriate: “I was always worried that

something like this would happen, and now it has. I'm so frightened I want to move out. Why can't the police do something about these kinds of dangerous people?"

That would have been usable, but it had problematic content and had to be edited. Because if the police know where the yakuza offices are and the local citizens know where the yakuza offices are, why doesn't the government shut them down? Well, yeah, why doesn't it? But that's a whole different can of worms. I think the final version of this comment was "I sure hope the police catch those people."

A housewife who lived next door added, "If one of those bullets had missed … I hate to think about it. It's a good thing no one was hurt." Now, that was more to the point, but it was factually incorrect, as two yakuza were now in critical condition. In the eyes of the public, two yakuza and only yakuza getting shot meant that "no one was hurt."

I filed my article, took a nap, and then headed out to see Sekiguchi.

Sekiguchi arrived back about ten. I was already in the house, feet under the *kotatsu* next to Yuki-chan, the elder daughter, who'd sweetly roped me into helping her with her English homework. Chi-chan, the younger daughter, was watching a horrible musical on television and eating candied squid on a stick. Mrs. Sekiguchi was reading the newspaper. The house was so small that I could stretch out my arms and almost touch the walls. But it was cozy.

Sekiguchi walked in, threw his jacket on the tatami, and immediately sat down with us on the floor, sticking his feet under the kotatsu.

"Otsukare-sama [a standard line, on the order of "Tough job, you must be worn out"]. What's going on with the investigation?" I said, wasting no time.

"Well, the Kokusui guys aren't cooperating. They're not talking. But whoever the gunman is had a lot of balls."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at all the other shootings. A couple of gunshots into the door. What does that do? But this guy, the guy doing this job, he's a goddamn kamikaze. He rings the doorbell, walks into the office, and says, 'Who's in charge?' He doesn't wait for an answer. He goes up to one of the Kokusui-kai mugs sitting there, raises his gun, and—*bang bang*—right into the chest and belly. Then he turns around and does the same thing to another mug. Then he walks out the door. He *walks* out the door. Then this eighteen-year-old punk, a yakuza wannabe, grabs the guy on the street, tries to go for the gun, which is in the gunman's right hand. They struggle. No contest—the gunman knifes the kid in the stomach with his other hand. And then he's outta there. The building manager hears all the noise, comes down the steps, puts the three wounded guys in his car, and drives them to the hospital. Cops are called. The CSI people are still there."

"Any idea what the gun was?"

"Tokarev, probably. Russian gun. Every yakuza has to have one these days."

"What are these guys fighting about?"

Sekiguchi lit a cigarette. "You wouldn't believe the shit these guys fight over. Here's what I heard. Two guys from the Yamaguchi-gumi go pay a visit to the Kokusui-kai office in Taito Ward, Tokyo. One of the Yamaguchi-gumi guys is named Nakai. His friend got in a car accident involving a Kokusui-kai guy, so Nakai and his buddy have shown up to smooth things over, settle the bills, whatever. Apparently, Nakai is a loudmouth and he says something to piss off the Kokusui-kai guys. One of them is Korean, right, so he's got a hot temper, and he pulls out a gun. Next thing, the Yamaguchi-gumi guys are on the floor."

"A gang war over a traffic accident?"

"Yeah, but no, it's not just that. The Yamaguchi-gumi rules Kansai [western Japan] and owns about forty percent of the market. They've been trying to expand into Tokyo [in Kanto, eastern Japan] for years. The Kokusui-kai guys are offended that the Kansai thugs

are even walking on their turf. Nobody wants them in here. In Saitama they don't have an office, not yet, so I think the trouble was just part of the bigger picture. Like, stay out. But it doesn't matter much. Once the bullets fly, there is no going back."

At the time of this gang war, the Kokusui-kai was the third largest crime group in Saitama, after the Sumiyoshi-kai and the Inagawa-kai. It had eighteen offices and around 230 known members. Cops were now stationed in front of each of the offices.

According to Sekiguchi, it wasn't unusual for yakuza to use a private detective agency as a cover, but the preferred fronts were real estate agencies and construction companies. The Kokusui-kai had done well pretending to be private dicks; they'd take an infidelity case, milk the client for all they could, and if they found out the spouse was cheating (almost always the case), they'd blackmail the cheater by threatening to tell their client the truth. It was a nice little racket.

On the morning of the eighteenth, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department received a call from someone claiming to be the gunman.

"The Konosu shooting? I'm the fucking guy."

He said he'd be turning himself in with the gun that afternoon, and as promised, he did. He was Takehiko Sugaya, twenty-seven at the time, a member of the Yamaguchi-gumi.

In Saitama, Sekiguchi was assigned to interrogate Sugaya. Sekiguchi's skills as an interrogator preceded him. Yakuza were known to confess on the spot, lest Sekiguchi in the course of interrogation get them to spill incriminating evidence about other crimes. (Sekiguchi wasn't bad with white-collar criminals either, although he stood out from other investigators with Ivy League educations and highfalutin backgrounds. The way I heard it, he'd treat yakuza with deference and respect, as if they were important people, and he'd treat bureaucrats and corporate criminals as if they were the scum of the earth—as if they were yakuza.)

I waited a day before going to see him. By now a case involving yakuza forging pachinko receipts and ripping off millions of dollars from the big pachinko giants was about to break. The gang war had ended, and now that the gunman was in custody, it was already old news. But Sekiguchi's job was not finished.

While Mrs. Sekiguchi prepared some late-evening fried rice for us, Sekiguchi and I huddled under the kotatsu and talked shop. Sugaya was proving to be a tough bird, he said. The kid was claiming that he'd done the job on his own; no one had put him up to it. Sekiguchi had reason to believe otherwise. In the Yamaguchi-gumi, if you knock out a rival gang member and then turn yourself in, you'll be promoted to executive class once you've served your time. It was a rite of passage. But in many cases, the real gunman went scot-free and the organization would send a proxy in has place. Sekiguchi wanted to determine if Sugaya really had been the gunman; fortunately, since the victims were alive, he had front-row eyewitnesses.

I took a long drag of the cigarette and tried to blow smoke rings, which I wasn't good at. Then I made my stupid remark of the day: "Okay, but who cares? Sugaya will be convicted, and he'll be out in three or four years. When yakuza kill yakuza, nobody gives a crap. Especially if they don't actually kill other yakuza but just wound them."

"Yeah, I think that's a problem."

"A problem?"

"Why should those guys get off any easier than anyone else? The crime is the same. Because they know that the courts will treat them differently, it encourages them to have gang wars. The guys are more willing to shoot each other because they know they won't be doing serious time."

"Well, that may be true, but Sugaya is still only going to get four years—max. Look at the statistics."

"I'm the interrogator. I could get this guy put away for ten."

"Ten years? In your dreams, Sekiguchi-san."

“Ten years, minimum.”

“I’ll make you a bet. If you get this guy put away for ten years, I’ll take you and your family out for *yakiniku*, and you can order whatever kind of beef you like. If he gets less than ten, you have to give me the list of all the yakuza offices and their executives in Saitama.”

Sekiguchi stubbed out his cigarette. “That’s a bet you’re going to regret. I may have two little girls, but they eat like five little boys. Prepare to ante up, Adelstein.”

Mrs. Sekiguchi chuckled at the two men in a pissing match. “I’ll be the witness to the bet. Jake-san, I don’t think you will win this one.”

I assured her that I’d never lost a bet in my life, then intoned, “Assault never carries ten years, even with gun violations.”

“Who’s talking about assault? This is attempted murder.”

I hadn’t thought about that. Anyway, you’d have to prove the intent. “Did Sugaya say anything like ‘Die, you bastard’ or ‘I’m going to kill you’?”

Sekiguchi winced. “No, he did not.”

“Well, how are you going to establish intent?”

“The legal principle is *mihitsu no koi*. Any reasonable person would know that if you shoot someone in the chest and gut at point-blank range, there is a strong likelihood that person will die.”

“Sugaya isn’t stupid. He’ll just say he meant to frighten them. It wasn’t like he put a gun to their head and finished the job. A couple of shots, and he ran. Panicked. No intent to kill.”

“You’re way off, Jake-kun. This guy is a soldier. He didn’t care whether they lived or died. He would have been happy to have killed them.”

“Maybe so, but is anyone stupid enough to admit that?”

“Oh, he’ll admit it to me.”

“Good luck. Let me know when I should pick up the list.”

With the bet between us, our banter continued. But Sekiguchi was serious about one thing: he detested the Yamaguchi-gumi and was happy they weren't in Saitama. "Once they take root in any prefecture, they spread like cancer. I'd take the Sumiyoshi-kai over those guys any day of the week."

To make a long story short, Sekiguchi got Sugaya prosecuted for attempted murder in addition to violations of gun and firearms laws. He appealed to Sugaya's "manly pride" to get him to tell the truth. Sugaya was put away for ten years. I had to take the Sekiguchi family out for yakiniku, dropping 30,000 yen ($300) for a meal of prime Japanese beef.

Shibata smiled.

"Jake-san, sometimes you are a real *bakayaro* [stupid guy]. You should never have bet the cop. Even I've heard of Sekiguchi. He was no friend of ours, but everyone respected him. And that guy Sugaya —I admire him. Yakuza used to be like that—you did the crime, and you did the time. It was gokudo. You didn't whine or plead, like the chin-pira do now. You live like a man, you take your punishment like a man.

"The punks today are afraid to go to jail. Too damn weak. That's why we farm out the dirty work to the Chinese and the Iranians. If they get caught, they don't talk and they just get deported. Sugaya is going to get out of prison and find there is no organization to go home to and no place where his honor is appreciated."

"You really think so?"

"It's all about money now. Loyalty to the oyabun, honor, endurance, obligation—they don't count as much. The Kokusui-kai Sugaya shot at are now part of our group. We merged with them last year, so now we're in Tokyo. Won't be long before we control the entire country. And I don't think that will be a good thing."

I was a little puzzled. "You're a yakuza yourself. Where's your team pride?"

He laughed. “Maybe I had pride in being a member of the organization once upon a time. But you get closer to the end, you question things. You begin to wonder if everything you took for granted is so good. The organization I entered isn’t the same as it was. When things become too big, they get out of hand, things go bad. A lot of the yakuza have no rules anymore, they don’t respect ordinary citizens, they don’t respect anything. They’re involved in all kinds of really bad shit. Especially the Goto-gumi.”

“More than before?” I asked, hating to ruin his nostalgia buzz.

He was quiet then. He put his hands on his knees and took a deep breath. “Maybe,” he said. “Maybe it always was shit. I don’t know. I’ve done a lot of bad things in my life, but I did a few things right. I never betrayed the oyabun, I never double-crossed a friend, and I never ran away from a fight. Maybe it ain’t much, but it’s the measure of what I am.”

“It counts for something.”

“You bet it does. Now, what did you want to ask me?”

“I’ve got two things.”

“I’m not asking you to number them. Just ask me.”

“I’m missing a friend. I haven’t seen her in a couple of months.”

“Give me a name.”

“Helena.”

“Do you have a picture?”

I gave him one. He looked at it, looked back at me.

“Give me the details.”

I filled him in. I told him who she was and what I had asked her to do. He flinched a little when I mentioned the Goto-gumi and the NGO name. He muttered something and motioned me to come to where he was sitting by the window. I could barely hear him, so I leaned over.

He slapped me across the face with such force that I fell backward and landed on my ass. My ears were ringing so hard I thought I’d

gone deaf in one of them. He stood up and glowered at me, motioned for me to get up. He was breathing a little heavily but seemed fine. I didn't feel fine.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" he screamed at me.

"I didn't know."

"You should have known. You're not a child, you're a man. You should never have asked her to look into that organization. What is wrong with you?"

"Goddammit, Shibata. I told her to stop."

"And you should have known she wouldn't. You liked this woman, maybe more, and she must have liked you. So why did you take the risk? Sometimes you're so fucking smart, Jake-san, and sometimes you're just a fucking idiot."

He gave me his hand and helped me up. His grip was strong. He sat back down.

"I'll look into it. I don't think you'll get the answers you want, but I'll ask. Now, what's the other thing you want to know?"

I sat on the bed, trying to sit up and stay up. My balance seemed kind of shot.

"I know that Goto wasn't the only guy to get a liver transplant at UCLA. I hear there are others. I want one more name."

Shibata offered me one of his cigarettes, I took it. He was already almost through the pack of Luckys.

He shook his head and stared at the floor for a few minutes. He looked up at me and stared into my eyes. I don't know what he saw, but he nodded again.

"I know what you're trying to do. I don't think it's wise. But I understand. Are you sure you want to go down that road? It's *kemono no michi."*

"Kemono no michi?"

"Sometimes in the mountains the animals make paths by using the same route again and again. If you don't know what you're

doing, you might think it's a path made by humans—it looks that way. If you follow that path, the path of beasts, you won't get anywhere at all. People lost in the wilderness, they follow these paths and only get more and more lost. Sometimes they lose their way and they die. It's not a path for humans, it's a dangerous diversion. Are you sure that's the road you want to take? It won't get you where you want to go."

"Look, I'm just pursuing the story. I'm not planning to do anything crazy."

"No, you're not planning at all. Think a little. Keep your eyes on the right road, not the wrong one."

Then the old bastard whacked me across the face again, even harder. And when I fell down this time, he kicked me in the stomach. I managed not to puke but curled up in a fetal position, feeling very stupid and a little scared. Actually, really scared.

"I'm not making jokes now. You cannot be careless. Don't trust anyone. If you think this is painful, what Goto will do to you or your friends if he knows what you're doing will hurt a thousand times more. Don't fuck around."

"I understand."

"Good. Now get your lazy ass up and get me some more Luckys. I'm out. The box is over there on the television."

I retrieved the cigarettes, but I wouldn't take them to him. I refused to go within striking range and tossed them at his head. He caught them and chuckled. We had a long conversation after that. Before I left, I reattached the smoke detector with great difficulty. It was really hard to stay balanced on the chair. Have someone slap you as hard as he can, and then you'll understand why.

In 2007, Shibata died. But before this, he got back to me with a name: Hisatoshi Mio, the founder of the Mio-gumi. He was also a backer of the Emperor of Loan Sharks, Kajiyama. It made a lot of sense. Goto had taught Kajiyama how to move money through Las

Vegas. It wasn't surprising that Goto also knew Mio. I was pretty sure now that the Goto case wasn't an isolated incident. There was something very strange happening at UCLA. I kept my promise to Shibata. I gave the letter to his wife, and she promised to give it to her son when he was old enough to read. I'll probably go back someday and make sure he got it. He never gave me anything about Helena.

Sekiguchi followed Shibata that autumn. I had suddenly lost both my main yakuza source and my main police source. My prospects for breaking the Goto story now looked bleak.

Sekiguchi was forty-eight years old. Thinking back on it, I'd known him and his family for almost fourteen years. He took his last breath at 3:45 P.M. on a rainy day toward the end of August. The whole family and I had returned to Japan and were staying with my mother-in-law. It had been good for the kids—they were becoming very skilled at English, and now they needed to brush up on their Japanese.

The day before we were supposed to return to the United States, around August 29, while we were all eating Chinese food, Sekiguchi's wife called and told me he'd passed away. I wanted to cancel the flight and to be there for the funeral.

I made everyone, except the kids, very angry. I had a heated argument with Sunao and my mother-in-law. They were both of the opinion that I should go to the wake, assuming there was one, and just visit the family the next time I was in Japan. I didn't agree. You wouldn't think that a weird Jewish kid and an organized crime cop ten years older than him would have become such good friends, but over the course of so many years, that's what had happened. I wanted to stay, but Sunao was not having that. I asked Sunao if she could take the kids home by herself. I'd escort her to Narita and have someone meet her at the airport in America and drive everyone home, but I was accused of putting my selfish need over the needs of my family.

We left the Chinese restaurant after eating and went back to Sunao's home. I had to at least see the Sekiguchi family and pay my respects to the dead. At 10 P.M., I found myself in a taxi heading in the rain toward the Sekiguchi house in desolate Konan. Sunao came with me. We weren't talking to each other. The rain was coming down so hard the taxi had to stop once or twice along the way. The taxi fare came to almost $250.

A midnight run to the Sekiguchi home. It felt like old times, but it wasn't. I was wearing a black suit I had with me and had borrowed a black tie from Sunao's mother.

I know that funerals and wakes are meaningless rituals, but not for the ones left behind. I'd promised Sekiguchi that when he died I would go to his funeral and pay my respects; that I would wear a real suit; and that I would try to wear matching socks. I owed him a stick of incense at least. You would think that people would understand that sometimes promises are binding even after death. It's one of the few regrets I have in my life: I had promised to go to his funeral, and I didn't.

His body was already home by the time I got there. It wasn't laid out in Buddhist fashion, which is typical in Japan. He was going to have a Shinto funeral. When I arrived, his body was on a futon in the living room, Shinto style. I didn't know anything about Shinto rituals. It was a new experience.

Sekiguchi had taught me more about reporting, interrogation, honor, and trust than anyone else I had ever known. I kind of considered him a second father. I had taken my Beni to see him before I took her to my own parents. Even in death, Sekiguchi still had something to teach me about Japan.

It was weird to see him laid out on the tatami floor like that. They took the white cloth off his face and let me see his expression. He looked as if he were smiling. He had that same shit-eating grin that he used to have when he would dangle tidbits of information in

front of me or crack a bad joke or when I'd lost yet another bet to him.

He'd been in a lot of pain over the previous months. Even intravenous dosages of morphine weren't doing the trick. The cancer was all over his body. For a while he'd been going to the Ariake Cancer Institute in Odaiba, about three hours from his home in Saitama. He was an outpatient, so after being blasted with chemicals and radiation, he'd made the trek back to Saitama by train, sometimes during the rush hour, when there were no seats.

I insisted on paying for him to stay at a hotel, Grand Pacific Le Daiba, which was close to the hospital, after his treatments. He needed to rest before going home. Of course, he protested and refused. He couldn't accept a gift like that. As a cop—and he was still working, unbelievably—he didn't want to take anything from me, nothing of monetary value. I told him I was working for a company that owned the hotel and I got the room comped.

It was a lie, of course. I think he knew that it was a lie and that I knew that he knew. But it was necessary. It allowed him to take the gift, and I wanted him to have it. We do that in Japan. There is the public image, *tatemae*, the facade that must be maintained, and then there is what's really going on. The tatemae was that he was just borrowing a room. It worked for him and for me. *"Uso mo hoben"*—lies are also skillful means—is a proverb that comes from a Buddhist sutra.

In that Buddhist sutra, there's a story about a bunch of children playing in a house. The house is on fire; it's very dangerous, and if the kids don't get out, they'll burn to death. However, the kids won't leave the house because they're having too much fun. People are yelling for them to leave, but they won't, and the door is locked from the inside. Someone tells the children that if they come outside there's delicious candy waiting for them. It's a lie, but it gets the kids out of the house and thus they are saved.

Uso mo hoben. Sometimes, yeah.

Unfortunately, I didn't have the power to get him out of the house. All I could do for him was keep him a little more comfortable as it burned down.

I knew how to pay my respects at a Buddhist funeral, but I was at a loss this time. I followed the protocol as Mrs. Sekiguchi laid it out for me, giving him water and bowing. I laid a cigarette on the table near his head with the food.

It wasn't the cigarettes that had given him cancer; it was betrayal. Another cop on the police force had leaked damaging information about him to a newspaper a few years back. He was a colleague of Sekiguchi's but resented Sekiguchi's success.

Sekiguchi's "crimes" were uncuffing a yakuza and feeding him a bowl of ramen before taking the guy into the police station to be arrested. Sekiguchi had also broken up a near prison riot by pulling a yakuza out of the holding cells and letting him have a smoke. All these things were violations of police protocol. The cop who had it in for Sekiguchi fed this to a reporter at the *Mainichi Shinbun*. It was published, and then all the newspapers followed the story up. He was "a bad cop," after all.

He was stripped of his detective position, demoted, reprimanded, and put on traffic duty. He spent a couple years there in limbo. It ate at him. That's probably when he got cancer. I think that was the real cause. It was a combination of betrayal, humiliation, and then frustration.

He had asked me to do some things a few months before he died. I kept most of those promises. I promised him I'd check on his family and his daughters periodically. I still do. It's hard to believe they're both women now. I look at them, and I still see the six-year-old girl and the nine-year-old girl who tried to convince me that I couldn't be Jewish because every single Jew had been killed in World War II, just as they'd learned in school. The younger one had wanted to take me to school as an exhibit for show-and-tell.

Sekiguchi lived well. He died well, too. He had looked good the last time I'd seen him; that's when I'd been sure he was going to die. Most people seem to get better right before the end: the half crazy become lucid, the cancer patient looks healthy. He spoke with his family the day before he died, and he had positive things to say to them; they had a good conversation. He left the world at peace with himself and his family. That's what Mrs. Sekiguchi told me, and I was glad to hear it.

In Buddhism, after forty-nine days, you are reborn, but in Shintoism, after fifty days, you become a deity, according to the Sekiguchi family. I looked at him and thought, I really hope that works out.

It's always good to have a god on your side.

I knew I was in trouble. I knew I had put my family in jeopardy. Helena was still missing.

I can still remember seeing that smile on Sekiguchi's face. It looked as if he was pretending to sleep. In my imagination, I could hear him talking to me. I wanted him to tell me what to do. I wanted to hear his words: "Jake, sometimes you have to pull back to fight back. Ask yourself, what time is it now?"

Well, God knows I was sick of getting my ass kicked. Pulling back didn't seem like an option anymore. Maybe it was time to fight back. It seemed better than the alternative.

1* My son Ray had been born in May 2004, while I was still on the police beat. His name came from the Japanese character for "politeness" and "reward" and "thanks."

2* Kobe beef.

Two Poisons

Helena's disappearance did something to me. If I had known what had happened to her, it would have been better. Not knowing was agonizing.

I needed to learn more about Tadamasa Goto, how much power he had, who his allies and his enemies were. Shibata's passing away was a big blow to me, Sekiguchi's even bigger.

Here's what I had gathered about Goto:

He had spearheaded the Yamaguchi-gumi infiltration of Tokyo and owned more than a hundred front companies. His personal wealth was estimated at more than half a billion dollars. At one time, he was even the largest single shareholder of Japan Airlines.

His claim to infamy was alledgedly ordering a hit on the esteemed Japanese film director Juzo Itami in May 1992. Itami had directed a film called *Minbo no onna*, which, unlike all previous yakuza films in Japan, portrayed the yakuza as money-grubbing, ill-mannered louts, not noble outlaws. Goto was not pleased with the film and especially disturbed by the implications that yakuza did not live up to their threats. On May 22, five members of his organization attacked Itami in the parking lot in front of his house, slashing his left cheek and his neck, inflicting serious injuries upon him.

Itami became a vocal supporter of the new anti–organized crime laws the Japanese government put in place that year and a general pain in the ass to organized crime. He was a living symbol of what the yakuza really did, not what they pretended to do. He allegedly killed himself a few years later by jumping from a tall building.

I collected hundreds of pages of material on the Goto-gumi. I used every trick I had learned while working for the *Yomiuri*. I had to

make some moral compromises to get them, but I needed to know my enemy. What became very useful to me was a top secret report that the National Police Agency, with the aid of police organizations all over Japan, compiled about Tadamasa Goto and his organization in 2001. A very valuable source gave it to me in exchange for services rendered.

They do not hesitate to take extreme measures or take into account the other people involved when it comes to planning an attack/reprisal. They will act in the presence of women and/or children, forcing them to watch gruesome, violent acts so that afterward they will not file criminal complaints.

The execution of reprisals is extremely deliberate and planned, unrushed over long periods. The division of roles is clear (preliminary inspection, hit man, lookout, etc.). No one is apprised of who is actually in charge. (Thus a far-reaching investigation is not possible.) They use passenger vehicles with plates taken (stolen) from outside the prefecture when perpetrating crime (making a far-reaching investigation also difficult).

The report also noted that another characteristic of his organization was "intimidation of the mass media," also stating that "using the organization name (and powers), members will seriously and relentlessly threaten whoever is responsible for unfavorable coverage."

Suffice it to say, by 2006, even before I had hooked up with Shibata, I suspected that not only Goto but three other of his associates had received liver transplants at UCLA.

Shibata's giving me Mio's name was huge, but in a way, the person who helped me the most was Tadamasa Goto himself. Goto's methods of keeping order within his organization had made enemies in his inner circle. The NPA report described his method of keeping control in vivid detail:

[The gang members are kept in check by] certain Punishment and Reward. There is always a conferral of honor or reward when applicable (family living expenses, postprison standing, cash rewards, gifts of cars, etc.).

In a situation where individual criminal activity creates trouble for the organization, Goto will demote that person. To make an example of a member, Goto will beat that person in

front of peers or force the person's peers to dole out the punishment.

Because of Goto's ruthless techniques, one of his soldiers, who had been forced to cripple a friend, approached me. He didn't like me very much, but he hated Goto more. He wasn't my only source in the organization, but he was the most reliable.

In November 2006, we had a meeting very far from Tokyo, and he told me something that took me completely off guard. Goto had been able to enter the United States because the FBI had let him in.

The FBI.

He gave me the approximate dates, and he told me the name of the person who had arranged it: Jim Moynihan, the legal attaché (de facto FBI representative) at the U.S. Embassy in Japan.

I knew Jim. He was a friend and a mentor. I didn't want to believe it, but I knew it was true. And now I understood why Goto wouldn't like it if I wrote that story: he'd sold his friends out to get clearance to enter the United States. It was a pretty clear-cut deal. He'd given authorities the names of some of the key gang bosses, documents, and lists of front companies, and even pointed them toward the financial institutions the Yamaguchi-gumi was using to launder money in the United States. Even in the mild-mannered world of the yakuza, ratting out your comrades would not be taken well. In fact, it's the kind of thing that could get you expelled from the organization or even killed.

In December 2006, I had dinner with Jim and asked him, as politely as I could over some cold Guinness, why the hell he would make a deal with that man.

Jim told me as much as he could. It made sense. He didn't give me all the details, but he gave me enough. On the record.

However, the critical piece of data came in the summer of 2007, when a detective, downloading porn on his computer at the Kitazawa Police Department, accidentally leaked onto a file-sharing network WINNY, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's entire

file on Tadamasa Goto. All the major Japanese newspapers reported on the leak. I immediately downloaded the files.

It was an information orgasm. It listed all his flight records, the names of most of his mistresses (at least nine of the fifteen), and other useful information. Now I knew the dates when he'd gone to UCLA for surgery and who'd accompanied him. There were other interesting tidbits in the files as well. One of his listed mistresses was a famous film actress. That was, of course, picked up and reported by the Japanese press, which loves celebrity gossip. What wasn't reported was that in the list of front companies was Burning Productions, Japan's largest and most powerful talent agency. Goto's control over Burning Productions was a valuable tool in his surpression of unfavorable reporting. Any television station that crossed Goto risked being denied access to Japan's top actresses, singers, and entertainers. This also meant that almost every newspaper affiliated with a television network, which is common in Japan, could also be indirectly threatened. Entertainment programming revenue beats news revenue every time.

In that gigabyte of data there were many things that confirmed what I had long suspected. After speaking with a source in the U.S. Justice Department and sources in the Japanese police and underworld, I was able to put it all together.

In January or February 2001, Goto's doctors at Showa University told him that if he did not get a liver transplant soon, he would die. Goto had hepatitis C and a heart condition and was a very unlikely candidate for a liver transplant in Japan.

In April 2001, Goto approached the FBI via Hoshi Hitoshi, the former "fixer" for Nobusuke Kishi, with deep connections to the LDP. (Mr. Kishi had served twice as prime minister of Japan. Kishi's grandson, Shinzo Abe, became prime minister in September 2006.) Kishi relayed Goto's offer.

The FBI wanted the names of important yakuza because Japan's National Police Agency refused to share that information with it,

due to “privacy issues.” This effectively made it impossible for the FBI to monitor yakuza activity in the United States.

Goto promised to give the FBI (and possibly another intelligence agency) a comprehensive list of Yamaguchi-gumi members, related front companies and financial institutions, and information on North Korean activities.

In exchange for that information, Goto wanted a visa to the United States so he could get a liver transplant at UCLA.[1*] Goto had set up the UCLA deal on his own, there’s no doubt about that. The visa came when the FBI pressured U.S. Immigration and Customs to grant him one, which it reluctantly did.

If I had been Jim, I would have taken the deal. The intelligence potential was huge. The FBI wasn’t giving him a liver, it was just giving him a key to the door. UCLA did the rest. According to Manabu Miyazaki, a journalist, apologist for the yakuza, and close friend of Goto’s, in addition to the yakuza-related intelligence, the FBI was especially interested in the information Goto had on North Korea. It was at a time when North Korea had been implicated in making high-quality counterfeit U.S. currency, and this was also of great interest to the United States. Goto had always had tight connections to North Korea, which allegedly supplied him with drugs, guns, and money.

The surgery took place on July 5. However, Goto gave the FBI only a fraction of the information he had promised. Once he had his liver, he hopped back on a plane to Japan and never spoke to the FBI again. There were no records of Goto returning to Japan.

For the FBI, “the operation” was not a singular success.

For Goto, the operation was a tremendous success. Goto returned to Japan before the end of the year, no longer with jaundiced eyes but healthier than ever.

At the annual Yamaguchi-gumi New Year’s party that year, Goto was in perfect health. He was, as the Japanese say, “drinking and eating like a whale” at the festivities and smoking like a chimney.

Once he bragged to Chihiro Inagawa, another yakuza boss, “Ever since I got that new young liver, I have no trouble getting it up,” pointing at his crotch. Inagawa allegedly then said to Goto, “You’ve got the devil’s own luck. You get the perfect donor, a young teenager—dead in a car accident just two months after you’re on the donor list—unbelievable coincidence.”

Goto answered him with a chuckle, “Oh, that was no coincidence.”

Inagawa didn’t laugh.

I was never sure whether Goto was referring to the traffic death or his quick jump to the top of the donor list. Somehow I can’t imagine him not rigging the game in one way or another.

Inagawa himself would later try to get into the United States for a liver transplant, only to have his visa application denied. When he was granted a special interview to plead his case with U.S. officials, the special agent in charge told him bluntly, “If you want to know why we won’t let you into the country, go ask Mr. Goto.”

ICE wasn’t going to get screwed again. It had a dim view of the deal made with the FBI and felt that it had produced little actionable intelligence.

Goto told one of his associates that he’d paid a total of $3 million for the liver. (Police reports have the figure as $1 million and speculate that Goto’s doctor was paid $100,000 for each “house call” to Japan, usually conducted at the Imperial Hotel.) The only people who knew about the deal with the FBI were Goto’s inner circle. This was a good thing to know.

It was while first poring over the other Yamaguchi-gumi materials that I realized that Goto was probably not the only one to have received a liver transplant at UCLA. There were probably three others.

I thought I had a hell of a story, not just from an American perspective but from a Japanese perspective as well. Japan has a very stringent organ transplant system. Donors are few, and operations are rare. Most Japanese people who need an organ

transplant either leave the country or die waiting for one. From an American perspective, it seemed deplorable as well. Why would Japanese criminals get precedence over law-abiding U.S. citizens? I had no idea.

I wrote up what I knew for a book, which was originally going to be published by Kodansha International, the English-language division of Kodansha, one of Japan's oldest and best-known publishers. I tried writing the story for a weekly magazine and was told bluntly, "No way." No reasons were given.

I decided to wait. And I would probably still be waiting if there hadn't been a minor glitch.

Kodansha International ran a long introduction to the book on its European Web site without letting me know; I only noticed it in November 2007. It didn't spell everything out, but it had enough, if you were Tadamasa Goto, to clue you in that trouble was brewing. I had Kodansha remove the page from its Web site, but I'd underestimated both the ability of Goto's henchmen to read English and the possibility that they could use Google Alerts. One of Goto's associates would later tell me that someone had probably managed to get a copy of the catalog description of my book, which might have confirmed their suspicions. By December 2007, I was getting signals that I was in serious trouble. In January 2008, I got definite confirmation that Goto was again planning to kill me.

My source asked me to come down and visit him in Kabukicho. I went and met him at his favorite bar; he liked it because it had a good selection of bourbon. He waited until I was fairly drunk before he laid it out for me.

"Jake, you're in a lot of trouble. Goto knows you're writing a book. He's not happy about it. I'd be really careful if I were you."

I didn't try to deny it. I shrugged. "What's he going to do? Threaten to kill me? He's already done that before."

"He won't threaten you. He'll just do it. He'll make it look like a suicide."

"How? I'm not the suicidal type."

“How do you think Juzo Itami died?”

“That was a suicide. I mean, of course, I thought he was killed the first time I heard about his death, but then I heard differently. He was depressed because the weekly magazine *Friday* was going to expose an extramarital affair. He jumped off a roof. If it had been suspicious, I’m sure the police would have investigated.”

“Did you see the article? Do you know he was laughing about it when the journalist approached him? He said, ‘Oh, she already knows.’ Does that sound like someone depressed and upset to you?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know the details of that. He left a note, though.”

“Yes, a note written on a word processor. Anyone could have written that note.”

Suddenly my bourbon didn’t taste so good.

“Why?”

“He was planning another movie. It was going to be about the Goto-gumi and its relationship with the religious group Soka Gakkai. Goto wasn’t happy about that. A gang of five of his people grabbed Itami and made him jump off that rooftop at gunpoint. That’s how he committed suicide.”

“How do you know that’s true?”

“It’s rude to ask a question like that.” His fingers curled around his glass so hard I thought he would break it.

I quickly apologized.

“So what should I do?”

“Be careful. Write it now, if you can.”

“I know most of the story.”

“If you don’t know everything, no one will believe you. It won’t do any good. You’ll have to write about everything, the others too.”

“Yes, I’ve heard there are others. Who are they?”

“I don’t know. You should know. I can introduce you to someone who can help you with that. She doesn’t like Goto very much.”

“She?”

“One of the many. She has her reasons.”

“Isn’t that dangerous for her?”

“I don’t think she cares.”

He gave me her business card; on the back was her address. He gave me another one as well; I recognized her from the leaked police materials.

“Why these two women?”

“He confides in them, I think. You’re good with women. They’ll confide in you. They like you. I hear there’s a certain female cop you’re very friendly with.”

“I’m friendly with everyone. I’m a nice guy.”

I asked for the check and paid. As we were leaving, I asked him why Goto didn’t just have me removed right now.

“He’s waiting for something to make up his mind. I don’t know what that is. He probably doesn’t know how much you know or who you’ve shared your information with. He takes his time. He’s looking at you. He’s collecting information about you. Maybe he’ll try to discredit you before you get a chance to write anything—put drugs in your apartment and call the police. Have a woman claim you molested her on the train. There are a lot of ways to neutralize you without killing you, because killing you, well, that would bring a lot of attention. You know he’s still on trial?”

Of course I knew Goto was on trial. Here’s what had happened.

In May 2006, Goto, the president of a real estate company, and eight others were arrested on suspicion of illegally transferring the ownership of a building in Shibuya Ward. According to the police, Goto, CEO of the listed company Ryowa Life Create, and the other suspects had falsely registered the transfer of ownership of a twelve-story building, the Shinjuku Building, which was partially owned by a Goto-gumi front company. The arrest stemmed from an investigation that had begun more than a year earlier. In March 2005, Kazuoki Nozaki, a fifty-eight-year-old adviser of a building

management company and partial owner of the Shinjuku Building, was stabbed to death on a street in Minato Ward, Tokyo.

The police had nabbed Goto for property law violations because they wanted to pin him for the murder of Nozaki. Everyone knew this.

The slaying had been carried out with typical Goto-gumi efficiency: small group, no witnesses, little or no trace evidence. I imagined that this was probably how I'd be taken out if the time came, stabbed to death in some back alley and left to bleed to death.

I told him that I was well aware of the trial. I was curious as to why I already hadn't met the fate of Mr. Nozaki.

"People know you. They think you're working for the CIA. Goto does at least. You're a Jew, too. He thinks there might be repercussions for whacking you."

"What does my being Jewish have to do with anything?"

"You could be Mossad."

"I can't believe we're having this conversation."

"I've given you what I can. You're on your own. Good luck. Do not underestimate the man. He's not underestimating you."

I didn't doubt that he was right.

Things went sour very quickly. I was told that Goto had decided that if he was found guilty—which in his condition would be a death sentence—he would have me killed.

I was placed under police protection on March 5, 2008. An FBI special agent accompanied me to the National Police Agency, and they discussed what measures they could take. The FBI contacted local U.S. law enforcement and had them put a watch on my house in America. At the meeting I was asked to clarify who my source was in the Goto-gumi, and I refused. I was warned that that would make it harder to justify twenty-four-hour protection on the part of the Japanese police, and all I could say was "Well, I'll take what I can get."

I was taken to the TMPD to meet the detectives from Organized Crime Control Investigative Division 3, which would be handling my protection. In the old days, those had been the guys I wrote about, not the guys I depended on to keep me alive.

Before I went to the TMPD offices, I sent a quick e-mail to the cops I knew there warning them to pretend they didn't know me. One of the detectives quickly wrote me back, "In a time like this, when a good friend is in trouble, I don't give a shit about how this would affect my career. Me and the others, we're going to tell the boss right now that we know you and you're an upright guy. We still owe you for the Soapland intel. We've got your back."

I wasn't very close to those cops; I considered them casual friends. I felt honored. I was discovering that people whom I thought were good friends weren't very good friends at all and people whom I considered acquaintances were some of the best friends I'd ever have. It's not often in life that we get into a situation that measures the loyalty and dedication of our friends. The results are probably never what we anticipate.

At the TMPD, we had a good talk. One of the detectives present shook my hand as I was leaving and added, "Goto's a real prick. The guy's been linked to more than seventeen murders and that attempted murder in Seijo. That's the one where his thugs couldn't find the guy Goto wanted dead, so they stabbed his wife. You're making his life hard. You're doing what we should be doing. Good luck."

It felt good to hear that.

I had some paperwork to fill out and had to go back to the National Police Agency and turn it in. On my way out, an NPA officer who knew me from my days in Saitama asked me to come downstairs to the cafeteria and have a cup of coffee.

Over a fairly decent cappuccino, we caught up on old times. The head of forensics, after serving as the head of the Saitama Police Department, had gone on to become the chairman of the local traffic safety association and was enjoying the job. A couple other cops

who had been on the dog breeder serial killer case had retired as well.

He had some good information for me and some bad news as well: “You’re probably thinking you should go home. Don’t do it. If you go home and he knows where you live, you put your family in the cross fire. He’d probably hire some gangbanger to do it, and if your family is around, they’re collateral damage. He’ll probably go after your friends if he can’t get to you.”

That was not what I wanted to hear. I wanted to go home. He had more to say.

“The year Goto went to UCLA, the NPA tracked close to a million dollars moving through his casino accounts. He had one in Tokyo with the Japanese branch of a major casino. You wrote about the Kajiyama case, so you know how that one works. Your information is good.”

“Do you have any suggestions?”

“I’m not really supposed to be saying this, but here’s the deal: you represent a threat to his reputation and his standing. If he wipes you out, maybe he can keep it quiet. Once you get it printed, there’s less incentive to kill you. You’re a writer, right? Time to write.”

On March 7, I pissed off the NPA by going to Goto’s trial at the Tokyo District Court. According to cops working the case, the main witness had been intimidated so much that he’d refused to testify. I managed to get into the trial for a few minutes. I sat directly behind the man.

I could have reached out my hand and strangled him if I’d been so inclined, or jabbed a pencil into his larynx. I didn’t do that. But I couldn’t resist sort of bumping him with my hand, if just for a second, to make sure he was real. He didn’t appear to notice.

I had to leave halfway through the proceedings. I wasn’t supposed to be there in the first place. I waited in the hall outside.

After the not-guilty verdict was announced to the press waiting in the hall, one of the detectives working the case said to me, “You

know, everyone who testified against Goto in this trial is going to vanish. And then, one by one, they'll be dead." He shook his head.

Something unexpected happened right after that. Goto walked out of the courtroom to the elevators with his bodyguard. Not out the back exit and not with any fanfare. And not a single reporter tried to talk to him. They looked, of course. But no one would follow him; as soon as his lawyer showed up in the hall, they ran toward him and away from Goto as fast as they could. And for a brief moment, in front of the elevators, there were only me, Goto, and his bodyguard. It was the only time I'd ever meet the man face-to-face.

For the first time, I could understand why he was so powerful. He wasn't big or muscular or imposing, but when he looked you in the eye, it felt as if he had his hand around your throat. We recognized each other. He mouthed something to me in Japanese. He wouldn't leave behind an audible threat. It seemed like a threat to me, but then again I'm not good at lip-reading in any language. I responded nonverbally as well—a simple one-fingered gesture. That was all we had to say to each other.

After Goto's bodyguard gently pushed his angry boss into the elevator, I followed the throng of reporters to where his lawyer, Yoshiyuki Maki, a former prosecutor, was holding court.

He was stroking his gray-speckled chin, rattling on about the injustice of Goto's arrest and prosecution. He was also making sure to imply that every newspaper that had written about Goto as if he were presumed guilty could be sued if the client was so inclined. It was Goto putting a muzzle on the already compliant press via Maki.

"Due to his unlawful arrest and this long trial, Goto-san has been through a personal hell. I'd like the media to reflect a little on the suffering my client has endured."

I couldn't really stomach that bullshit, and I raised my hand to ask a question. It turned into more of a tirade than a question, which wasn't a very professional thing to do. You're not supposed to bring issues of right and wrong into the courtroom. We're not supposed to accuse the lawyers for the yakuza of being sellouts and

criminals themselves. They're just doing their jobs. However, I had a little trouble divorcing myself from the proceedings. And honestly, what he was saying was an insult to the dead. If there was anyone in the yakuza who deserved to suffer, it was this man.

"Excuse me, what exactly do you mean by *his* suffering? This is a man whose organization kills people, sells drugs, distributes child pornography, and sexually exploits foreign women. The amount of suffering the Goto-gumi and therefore Goto have inflicted on innocent people is immense. Why should anyone give a damn about his suffering? As a former prosecutor, how can you even say those things?"

Maki was taken aback, either by the question or by my rage. He flinched visibly. The other reporters all moved away from me as if I were a rabid dog. Maki cleared his throat and said, "It's my job to defend my client, and there is no question that Goto-san has not committed any illegal act, that this …"

As he droned on, I turned my back and walked away. A few seconds later, I heard a titter from the assembled reporters. I suppose that Maki had made a joke about me, and I guess I felt a little like a joke myself. But I'd seen him flinch, and that felt good.

The day after Goto's trial, I went back to work. I gathered all my notes and I gave them to reporters I knew and trusted. Some I knew and didn't trust. I didn't want the scoop; and I wanted the story out there; I didn't care who got credit for it.

While I was doing this, I ran into a serious problem.

Some people from the NPA came over to the house for drinks. I'd known one of them, Akira-kun, since his days in the Gunma police. Sometimes I'd show up at the place where he trained at *kenjutsu* (sword fighting) and join the practice. I had no aptitude for that martial art either, but it was always a good way to hang out with the cops and forget that reporter–police officer division for a few sweaty hours. In a stroke of luck, Alien Cop had been transferred to the NPA for a year, and he was now in the Organized Crime Control Bureau. He brought with him a giant bottle of Otokoyama (Man

Mountain) sake. A good friend from college and part-time research assistant, Asako, was also there, pouring drinks, flirting with the cops, and cracking jokes. We sat in the tatami room, cross-legged around an antique fold-up table, a *chabu-dai*.

We were talking about the Goto trial and its unhappy ending and how we thought Goto's lawyer, Maki, was a sellout shyster, and I slightly defended Maki, pointing out that he'd started out with good intentions once upon a time. He'd written an excellent book about the Japanese legal system a decade or so before.

In the midst of the festivities, Alien Cop put down his sake glass and nodded at the other three guys next to him, as if to say, "Hey, let's do this." He cleared his throat.

"Jake, there's a guy in the police force who's in Goto's pocket, Lieutenant K. He's been asking about you. We know he's corrupt but he brings in good intel about non-Goto-related stuff, so he's kind of allowed to do his thing."

I put down my glass and filled it again.

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"It means that Goto knows everything about you. Where you live, where your family lives, everything we have about you on file. And it's possible, actually pretty likely, that he also has your phone records. Because you have your cell phone number printed on your business cards, it probably was pretty easy for him."

Nodding, Akira-kun added, "The word is he's hired the G Detective Agency to do a full due diligence on you. Goto owns at least two private detective agencies. Blackmail and extortion are his speciality. If you've got skeletons in the closet, they're going to be out pretty soon."

Apparently the Kokusui-kai wasn't the only yakuza group with its own private eyes.

Alien Cop asked me to show him my cell phone. I pulled it out of my pocket and handed it over. He looked at the directory for a second and handed it back.

“You need to figure out who you have been talking to the most in the last two months. Because if Goto feels he can’t get at you or wants to know where you are, those are the people he’ll go after. Lieutenant K. is Goto’s proxy. If K. has a phone number, he can find the address; he just has to make a few calls. Even if he can’t, G Detective Agency has the resources. You should warn the people you’re close to to be very careful.”

Alien Cop poured me another glass of sake. “Drink up. I doubt the old man will do anything at all, but we thought you should know this much—not all policemen are your friends.”

“Well,” I said, “here’s to good friends—kanpai!”

“And by the way,” Alien Cop said while pouring rounds for everyone, including Asako, “apparently K. is looking for a good picture of you. There aren’t many. He knows that I know you and asked me if I had any. I said no. He may try to meet you. Don’t take that meeting.”

“Why not?”

“Lieutenant K. is a sketch artist with a photographic memory. Sketches are actually better for identifying people than photos sometimes. You meet the guy once, and there’s going to be a nice portrait of you hanging up in Goto-gumi headquarters. And maybe a wallet-size copy with the guys that are sent to take you out.”

“Great. What should I do now?”

“Write the fucking article and stop pissing around. Remove the incentive to shut you up. Pretty simple. And then you can take me out to that strip bar with all the white chicks with *ushipai* [cow breasts]. You owe me, Adelstein.”

Asako laughed at that. “Jake, I didn’t know you frequented such places.”

Alien Cop chuckled. “You don’t know him very well at all then.”

Alien and I sneaked outside for a smoke once during the evening, and he asked me how I was doing.

“Pretty good.” It was all I could say.

“I checked around on that friend of yours.”

“And?”

“Nothing. The place she was working got raided, maybe in February 2006. They reopened without gaijin babes. I tried to locate her. I called in a favor with Immigration. There’s no record of anyone named Helena leaving the country. Maybe she had a different name? Dual citizenship?”

“Don’t think so.”

“Were you sleeping with her?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Because she was a good friend. I mean, she is a good friend.”

“You had issues with what she did?”

“That’s not it.”

“Are you screwing anyone else?”

“I’m a gentleman. On principle alone I won’t answer that question.”

“I was right, wasn’t I?”

“About?”

“You know.”

“Oh, yeah. Expediency rules. You were wrong about one thing, though.”

“Which was?”

“It’s not a slippery slope, it’s a friggin’ waterslide.”

“Well, Jake, sometimes, you know, you have to fight poison—”

“—with poison. I’m familiar with the proverb.”

“Well, you do what you have to do to get the job done. That’s what matters at the end of the day. You get that.”

“I do,” I assured him. He wasn’t anything like Sekiguchi, but he was wise in his own way. Maybe not a good cop but a good person

and a good friend. He was putting his career on the line for me, breaking the blue wall of silence. I wasn't sure I deserved his benevolence, but I was glad to have it.

We kept drinking until 11:30, when everyone split to catch the last trains home. After they had gone, I poured myself a drink and lit a cigarette, turned on some Miles Davis, and turned down the lights, thinking.

When you drink alone, you know you have problems. The whole world seemed dead, and the only sounds were the crackle of cigarettes, the wind lightly shaking the rain shutters, and the CD gently spinning in the Bose stereo, radiating the sounds of "Final Take 2."

I don't think I've ever felt that lonely in my entire life.

It hit me like a punch in the gut: the realization that I'd endangered every person I cared about, liked, loved, or simply knew. And it didn't really matter how they felt about me—anyone I'd called on that damn phone was now potential leverage for a man who had no qualms about using people like cannon fodder.

I really needed someone to talk to. I was a little drunk and not thinking very clearly, and I called Sekiguchi's cell phone. It was still in my address book; I'd never taken it out. It rang a few times before I realized that he could never answer it. I had no one to guide me now. No one to ask for good advice. No mentor. I was on my own.

What would Sekiguchi do?

That was my mantra to myself. Okay, first he'd assess the situation. I did. It didn't look good.

Most yakuza leave civilians out of a conflict. At least that's what they're supposed to do. It's not considered honorable to attack the wife, the lover, the best friend of a guy who's wronged you. Any real yakuza isn't going to beat up the brother of a deadbeat; he's going to beat up the deadbeat himself.

Tadamasa Goto was a different breed. He had a reputation for scorching and burning. And this fucking cop had practically handed

him a can of gasoline. Now I had to figure out who he was the most likely to burn, maybe literally.

I needed to do some damage control, and I decided it couldn't wait. I went upstairs, grabbed my box of business cards, and came back down. I dumped all the cards on the floor, fanning them out. I opened my laptop and typed the names of everyone on my cell phone, not being bright enough to transfer them to my computer digitally. I ranked my friends by potential risk. I didn't have my own phone records, so I went through two months of e-mails and tried to reconstruct from them where I had been and whom I had been with.

And among all the business cards, there was Helena's. Crumpled, the edges frayed from being stuffed in my wallet and taken out, discolored from being carried in my pockets, creased, faded.

I remember when she gave it to me. I had to earn that meishi. I'd given her mine on the first meeting. It wasn't until the third or fourth time we met that she trusted me enough to tell me her real name. She was wearing a black leather jacket over a simple red dress and riding boots, her hair pulled back in a ponytail. She did an elaborate parody of a Japanese bow as she offered her meishi with both hands, adding, "Helena *desu*. A whore but not just any whore—a professional whore." And she had laughed when she said it, her eyes twinkling with amusement at her own joke.

I've always kept a haphazard diary. It's a good thing to have because we forget so much. As a reporter you meet so many people, cover so many tragedies, write so many stories, it's hard to keep track of what's gone by and where you have been. But in some objects there are more memories than in a phonebook-sized diary. I held that card in my hand, and I felt as if it weighed a hundred pounds' worth of memory.

We'd used that card once to represent Park Place in her Monopoly set. I dropped by her place on a rainy Sunday, after doing some work at the office, and we played a marathon session. We were missing Park Place, so she put down her card in its place. I argued that it didn't have the rent or any of the pertinent information on it,

and she recited all the figures from memory, adding, “I know Park Place, baby. This woman only goes for the high-class real estate, and I am so going to own your ass by the time we’re done.”

It was true. By the time the game was over, I was Lehman Brothers Japan. She was really good at tactical games. Monopoly, Battleship, Othello. It was bad for my ego. I think those were her only hobbies.

Among the piles of business cards, I found the deed for Park Place. I guess I’d been the culprit.

I couldn’t recall the last time I’d played Monopoly. And then I remembered how much I missed having her to speak to, and then I couldn’t breathe for a few seconds.

I didn’t want to think about it. But I did.

If I hadn’t backed down in 2005, maybe Goto would’ve been ousted from power and this wouldn’t be happening. At the time, it had seemed like the right decision. A strategic retreat. But had it really been that? Had it been an act of cowardice? Maybe just laziness? I replay that moment a lot.

I decided then that I would do anything to bring him down. I was tired of running. Realistically, I didn’t have much. I didn’t have nine hundred people working for me or a couple million hidden in the bank. I had some good friends, some information, some contacts, and a lot of raw anger.

But before I could do anything, I had to make some phone calls, send some e-mails. Many people were not very happy to hear what I had to say. Some of them were never my friends again. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little bitter about that but I understand. Friendship does not usually include an implicit agreement to become a human target.

I wrote the piece.

It seemed like such a simple thing: publish or perish. Literally.

The problem was that no one would publish my article. Not even the people I was counting on.

"The story is too old." "We don't want to upset the NPA, they'd look pretty foolish if this is true." "I don't think the FBI would confirm this for us." One newspaper seemed interested in publishing it, but all it wanted to do was lambaste the FBI. I didn't think that served any real purpose. I didn't think the FBI was wrong to have made the deal, and I didn't want Jim lampooned. I couldn't go along with that.

Only one person, a senior editor at a publishing house, was straight up with me. "This is scary stuff. We publish this, and not only will we have to deal with Goto's lawyers, we'll have to spend a fortune on beefing up corporate security. Retaliation will be certain. People will get hurt. Maybe our offices will be firebombed. And frankly, we do some printing for Soka Gakkai, and Goto will have it drop its contracts with us. Sorry."

I think it was probably one of the worst times in my life. I had almost everything, but I couldn't do anything with it. One magazine assured me that it would run the story if I could just get a little more hard evidence. I made a quiet trip to the West Coast of the United States to talk to an art dealer who laundered money for the Goto-gumi. It was a disastrous meeting.

I couldn't get what the magazine wanted and demanded. I had an increasing sense of things falling apart. I spent one evening with the *The Perfect Manual of Suicide* in an old hotel built in the twenties, contemplating giving it a try. It seemed like an option. In Japan, after a certain number of years, many life insurance policies pay off even in cases of suicide. If I took myself out, I'd leave behind money for my family and there would be no reason for Goto to bother anyone I cared about. I never would have imagined a decade before that I might even consider joining the ranks of the unfortunate who put the manual into practice. I wasn't very happy with myself, and I worried—about everything.

You could say I was a little depressed. If it hadn't been for a phone call at the right time from the right person, I might have taken that route, which I'm ashamed to admit.

Finally I decided to write the story myself—in English. I was smoking a cigarette, watching the sun come up at an airport, and getting ready to go back to Japan, and then I suddenly knew what to do. I should have known that my article would never be published in Japanese first. I should have taken a different approach from the start.

I figured I could get it published in the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan (FCCJ) newspaper. I was wrong about that as well. After submitting the story, I was accidentally e-mailed a memo from one of the editors, the gist of which was "The FBI giving a visa to an infamous yakuza so he can get a liver transplant? Sounds totally unbelievable. Maybe this guy is a little nuts."

That hurt. Yeah, I'm sure I came across as a fruitcake. You have to admit, it was an incredible story.

I reached out to everyone I knew, and then a family friend introduced me to John Pomfret, the editor of *The Washington Post's* Outlook section. He thought I was a little crazy as well. I didn't blame him. He asked for proof. I gave him everything I had, about a hundred pages.

I've never had a story vetted as hard as that one. I spent hours a day answering questions, checking facts, and sourcing my material in the more than a month it took for Mr. Pomfret to be satisfied. Finally, *The Washington Post* got independent confirmation from the FBI that I was telling the truth. And on May 11, it ran the story. The FCCJ came around as well, publishing my article but omitting Goto's name.

I did one more thing before the article was published. I contacted a guy in another faction of the Yamaguchi-gumi—the board. I knew that Goto was considered a troublemaker by its top executives.

I explained to the guy from the board that I was writing an article about Tadamasa Goto making a deal with the FBI. It would be in

English. I asked him to pass on the article, and I requested a comment from Yamaguchi-gumi headquarters, not that I thought they'd really give me one. I told him, "I want to know if this deal was okayed by the Yamaguchi-gumi headquarters and if so, why? Is this considered a problem or not?"

I gave him the the story in English and my translation of it. He read it on the spot. He showed no reaction at all.

He called me a few days later. He was very polite.

"We don't have an official comment. The Yamaguchi-gumi, as you know, doesn't do interviews anymore, nor do we make comments. However, I have been authorized to say thank you very much for bringing this to our attention. We did not know. We would really prefer to handle this matter internally. We realize you've spent a lot of time on this story, and we'd like to compensate you for your time and effort."

I wasn't sure what he was talking about, so I asked bluntly, "I'm not Japanese. I'm a foreigner. Subtlety is lost on me. What are you saying?"

"I can offer you three hundred thousand dollars not to write the story. I just need the name of your bank, your account number, and the branch you bank at. You'll have the money tomorrow."

"I can't accept that."

"I can get you half a million in a week. But I'll have to send it to two different bank accounts. You can set up another one easily if you don't already have one."

"It's not the amount that I have trouble with. Thank you. I will continue to keep you posted."

"Well, I don't think you're making the wisest of decisions. You could accomplish what I think you'd like to accomplish and walk away a wealthy man. Start a new life."

"I like my life. I appreciate the offer, and I am honored. I will have to decline."

"Please keep me posted."

I promised I would.

I would be lying if I said I wasn't tempted to take the money and run. But if I had, they would have owned me.

I sent a copy of the article to the *Yomiuri* before it came out. It seemed like the appropriate thing to do. It ignored it. So did every other newspaper in Japan. I had pretty much figured that this would be the case.

That's why I had already begun talking to the *Los Angeles Times* before the *Washington Post* article was ready to go. I'd met the San Francisco bureau chief, John Glionna, on his trip to Japan that May, and he'd quickly picked up the scent of a good story. I worked with him and Charles Ornstein for weeks. *The Washington Post* article hadn't mentioned UCLA, and that made them very happy. It was the frontpage story of their newspaper on May 31. This time the Japanese media couldn't ignore it, although some did. Almost every media outlet that did report the story chickened out by writing, "According to an article in the *Los Angeles Times* …" It's a standard tactic in Japan for reporting troublesome news: blame it on someone else. "We didn't say it—it was the *Los Angeles Times*!" I didn't see a single article in which anyone attempted independent verification of the story or an attempt to dig any deeper.

The story was out. However, Goto remained unfazed. I don't know how he explained it away, but it had no visible impact. I, on the other hand, slept a lot better at night. Now I was a very visible target, and in many ways that made it a lot less likely for me to be snuffed out or harm to come to anyone associated with me. But it was clear that if I wanted to take Goto down, I'd have to write everything in detail and in Japanese.

Tomohiko Suzuki, a good friend and former yakuza fan magazine editor, approached me and asked if I was interested in writing a chapter of an anthology of "forbidden news stories" for Takarajima Publishing House. I asked if we could write it together. It was a hell of a thing to ask him because it meant that he'd be raising the ire of

the Goto-gumi as well. He didn't flinch. He warned me that I'd be taking a huge risk. I said I was willing to do it.

That's when he told me I'd need a bodyguard. I recognized the name of the guy, Teruo Mochizuki. He had been a good friend of Yasunobu Endo's, the yakuza crime boss that Gen Sekine had killed in the 1990s. They weren't in the same organized crime group, but sometimes friendships among yakuza transcended organizational restraints. A Sumiyo Shikai member could be "blood brothers" with an Ina-gawakai member; a Yamaguchi-gumi member could be brothers with a Kokusuikai member. Mochizuki and Endo had one of those relationships. What mattered is that we knew each other. I asked Suzuki why Mochizuki was willing to do it.

"He's no longer a yakuza. He left last year. He has a one-year-old son and no job. He's the perfect bodyguard and driver. He's a good guy."

"Yeah, I know him. But he used to be a crime boss! He had, like, a hundred guys working for him, I think."

"Yes."

"So isn't that a step down, working for me?"

"Absolutely. But it's not like a middle-aged yakuza with nine fingers and a whole-body tattoo has a lot of options. It'll be fine!"

So I hired Mochizuki. I had some money saved away from a well-paid project researching the pachinko industry for a company in California. I didn't really think I had much of a choice.

By July the anthology was ready to go. Mochizuki had been with me for some time by then. I wanted his opinion before I submitted the final draft. He knew Goto fairly well; I thought he'd be a good person to ask.

He read the manuscript, and he did not look well for the reading. He's a very polite fellow, and it took him a few second to say what was on his mind.

“Jake, you know, if you write this, he may try to have both of us killed. You first, of course. He really hates you. No one will think less of you if you don’t want to do it. You could walk away.”

Mochizuki-san took out a cigarette from his coat pocket, handed it to me, and shielded the flames of his Zippo as he lit it for me.

It’s a weird feeling having an ex–yakuza crime boss light your cigarettes and make coffee for you in the morning.

Of course, he wasn’t a crime boss now; he was working for me. I’d like to say he was working *with* me—but that’s not how Mochizuki-san would see it. I paid his salary; that made me the boss. He was fifty years old, I was thirty-nine. He was my senpai and a lot tougher than me, but he was following my orders. I never quite understood that yakuza soldier mentality, but I appreciated the work ethic.

He was wearing a long-sleeved shirt as usual; it covered up the tattoos. The missing finger on his left hand, though, couldn’t be covered up. He should never have been a yakuza, he should have been an artist. He’d been an artist once and not a bad one. But he’d hung out with the wrong people, racked up debts in Soapland, and drifted into the yakuza. When his subordinate screwed up and he chopped off part of his pinkie to show atonement and remorse, that pretty much killed his chances of returning to life as an artist—you need all ten fingers to do his kind of art. He was forced out of the yakuza as well—for insubordination. He didn’t like the increasingly “money at all costs” approach the upper management was taking; he was behind the times, a relic of a period when all yakuza adhered to some sort of code, morally flawed as it might have been. A year ago, he’d been in charge of a hundred gangsters; now he was lighting cigarettes for some weird Jewish guy who was more Japanese than American. And putting his life on the line as my bodyguard twenty-four hours a day.

We were both outcasts in our own way, I guess. We certainly hadn’t ended up where we’d planned to be. I inhaled shallowly, and

I exhaled deeply. My lungs weren't what they used to be. I looked at Mochizuki. He was waiting for my answer.

"I'm willing to do it. Fuck it, he's going to kill me anyway. He's just waiting for things to settle down. If this is a chance to ruin the man for good and maybe get him kicked out of the Yamaguchi-gumi, I want to do it."

"Then I'll watch your back."

"I appreciate that, but what's in it for you?"

"A new life. I like working for you."

"I pay you a terrible salary."

"Yes, you do."

"I thought you wanted to go back to being a crime boss once things settle down at your old organization."

"Nope. I've changed my mind. These last couple of months, getting to spend time with my son and the wife, it's been good. I like the work you give me to do as well. I can walk down the street on a rainy day and not have to watch my back."

"I only have enough cash to pay you until the end of the year."

"Well, then I'll look for a new job."

"Thank you. Any suggestions?"

"Take out the word *betrayed*. Betrayal is a loaded word. If you say Goto 'betrayed' the Yamaguchi-gumi, you're throwing gasoline on the flames. Find a better word."

I followed his suggestion.

He made one small request as publication neared.

We were sitting downstairs, smoking cigarettes in the living room and listening to an obscure Japanese rock band that he loved, when he asked me for a favor.

"Jake, I want you to know that if anything happens to you, I'd find out who did it. And I'd kill them. You probably know that, right?"

“No, I wouldn’t expect it, and you shouldn’t do it.”

“Isshukuippaku no ongi. It’s Japanese you should know. In the yakuza world it refers to the debt owed to the man who puts you up for a night and feeds you. You’ve taken me in and looked after me, and my family and I owe you. I always pay my debts. That’s what a real yakuza does.”

“I appreciate the sentiment, but—”

“Then respect what I say. That’s what I’ll do. If I didn’t do that, what kind of man would I be? I wouldn’t be a man at all.”

“What’s your request?”

“If anything happens to me, don’t try to avenge me. Leave it alone. You’re not a yakuza, but you’re a good man in the end. Promise that you will take care of my son—make sure he gets a good education, grows up right. That’s what I need you to do. That’s what I would ask you to do.”

“Of course I’ll do that. If that happened, I’d adopt him as my own. And what would you want me to tell him about you?”

“Tell him that his father was a yakuza, one of the last real yakuza and damn proud of it.”

“I will. If that happens. And your wife?”

“Her? Oh, just make sure she doesn’t remarry an asshole. Or a journalist. Those guys are nothing but trouble.”

I wasn’t sure he was kidding.

The anthology was published on August 9, under the title *Heisei Nihon Taboo Daizen 2008* (The Taboo News of Japan 2008). My guy in the the board had a copy of the chapter long before it was available on the newsstands.

I included something that had never been published: the names of the other three yakuza who had gotten liver transplants. After Goto, there was Yoshiro Ogino, a gang boss in the Matsuba-kai, another Tokyo yakuza group.[2*] He and Goto were blood brothers. Ogino also

allegedly donated $100,000 to UCLA after his surgery. He was probably followed by Hisatoshi Mio, the name Shibata had given me. Then there was Saburo Takeshita. He's the Keyser Söze of the Goto-gumi, a financial wizard. He runs twenty front companies and a lot of the Goto-gumi finances. In 1992 he was arrested for threats and assault by the Shizuoka Police Department along with an accomplice. He had gone to collect money from a local company owner, and when the fifty-one-year-old man couldn't pay, Takeshita had ordered him to "bring out your daughter so I can slice open her face." When the man wouldn't comply, Takeshita and his buddy kicked the man so hard in the chest and legs that he had to be hospitalized for several weeks.

Yes, all of them were hardworking Japanese men worthy of receiving livers before any lazy, worthless Americans should.

In UCLA's defense, it has never been proven that UCLA or Dr. Busuttil knew at the time of the transplants that any of the patients had ties to the Japanese mafia. Both have said in statements that they do not make moral judgments about patients and treat them in accordance with their medical needs. However, they have not explicitly denied knowing that some of these patients had yakuza ties; they have simply refused to address the issue of what they knew about the four and when they knew it. It should also be noted that the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in conjunction with UCLA conducted an investigation into whether the UCLA medical center or its staff acted improperly when it performed liver transplants on the four Japanese patients. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the investigation found no evidence of improper conduct. However, many have questioned the morality of giving organs to foreigners with criminal records at the expense of Americans.

What happened at UCLA may not just be morally questionable, but federal law enforcement sources suggest that UCLA may unwittingly have gotten involved in money laundering. Several special agents explained to me on background that money laundering, on an international level, simply means the transfer of

criminal proceeds from overseas to the United States, as in the Emperor of Loan Sharks case. Since yakuza generally obtain most of their money from criminal activity, there is at least a good possibility that some of the money paid to UCLA by at least one of the four treated men with yakuza ties stemmed from illegal activity in Japan. To my knowledge, none of the men treated have been investigated for money laundering and any investigation would require the assistance of the Japanese authorities. And, of course, the question remains whether UCLA even knew that the men they treated were yakuza (to my knowledge, they have never denied knowing the men had yakuza ties but emphasized that they do not pass moral judgment on their patients) and whether they knew that any of the payments (or donations, for that matter) could have stemmed from illegal activities. I would love to know the answers.

The reaction to the anthology was fierce. Suzuki got all the phone calls and the threats. I guess I was lucky in that I didn't have to deal with it. The book was noticed and written up a little here and there. One yakuza fan magazine, *Shukan Jitsuwa*, did an article on the book and myself, accusing me of being (a) a CIA agent, (b) a pawn of the CIA and possibily the International Jewish Conspiracy, or (c) a publicity hound and an idiot American with no understanding of how great the yakuza really are and how much they contributed to Japanese society.

I didn't know it, but around the time the anthology was published, Mochizuki's blood brother, who was still an organization man, parked four cars in my neighborhood twenty-four hours a day. It was a warning to the Goto-gumi that I was essentially under the protection of another crime group. I hadn't asked for that to happen, but I'm glad it did. He didn't ask me if it was okay because I would have said no. I never wanted to find myself in debt to any Japanese mafia group. But that's how it worked out. I owed the man, and I had to respect him for sticking his neck out for me.

There was one more negative repercussion. Kodansha International pulled the book. It had outsourced a risk assesment of publishing it. The conclusion hadn't been good.

However, around October 14, Goto was officially expelled from the Yamaguchi-gumi. Who says anthologies lack punch? In essence, the party line was that the wealthiest and most influential yakuza in the country had been kicked out for partying and playing hooky. However, the police assured me that in fact the publication of *Heisei Nihon Taboo Daizen 2008* had been the tipping point. I was warned to lie low for a while.

A number of Goto's associates were also suspended, expelled, or banished for life from the organization. The Goto-gumi was split into two crime families, and Goto was no longer a crime boss—he was an ex–crime boss. It was a great day for me. I got congratulatory calls from cops, friends, other reporters, and sources.

On the fifteenth, I answered the phone and heard a voice that blew me away. I'd heard it before on a DVD of a Yamaguchi-gumi ceremony, but I'd never expected to get a call from someone that high up in the organization. He identified himself, and then he was short and to the point.

"Thank you for bringing matters to our attention. We've resolved them satisfactorily, I believe. We appreciate your hard work."

Then he hung up.

I have no idea how he got my number.

1* Goto had allegedly been introduced to UCLA and his doctor by Nobu Naiya, the father of one of Japan's most famous soccer players, Kazuyoshi Miura, also known as "Kazu." (For numerous reasons, Kazu avoids using his father's last name.)

2* To the best of my knowledge, Ogino—who is now the leader of the Matsubakai—and the other yakuza did not make deals with the FBI and managed to sneak in under false names and/or false pretenses. Goto allegedly played a role in getting them into UCLA but it's unclear how the other three were placed on the UCLA liver transplant waiting list.

Epilogue

There was one more thing I had to do.

I arranged a meeting in Hong Kong with the person who'd first turned me on to the Goto story, Cyclops. He'd fallen out of favor with the organization and was very hard to track down. His father had put us in touch. He partially blamed me for the trouble he'd gotten himself into, and I'm still not sure why. But he'd agreed to meet, maybe out of some residual sense of duty and obligation. We met in Hong Kong International Airport; I wanted safe territory. I didn't trust him. I had my reasons. We sat in the waiting lounge and had a short conversation. I wanted to know one thing: had he deliberately given me that information, had I been set up? I'd been wondering about it for a while.

Cyclops had a fast answer to that.

"Of course we set you up. If you had done what you were supposed to have done, Goto would have been over in 2005. You didn't do it. I told everyone you'd write it, but you just walked away. And I was fucked. I helped you out with the Kajiyama story and you fucked me over. You ruined my life. Got me kicked out."

I didn't really have a reply to that. Not a good one.

"How was I supposed to have known what I was supposed to do? You never told me. Are you sure you didn't get kicked out because you're a meth head?"

It was true. He had serious problems with speed. He'd been an addict so long that even when he wasn't taking it, he was an

angry, emotional, paranoid SOB. *Ponchu* is the slang for a guy like him: it sounds a little like punch-drunk, and the meaning is probably pretty close. It probably wasn't a good thing to point out.

"Everybody takes that shit. No big deal. That isn't what got me booted out. It was your fault."

"You gave me a piece of the puzzle. I didn't have enough to write the story. If you had told me about the FBI, it would have made a difference."

"I didn't say the FBI. I told you that he made a deal with the cops, that should have been enough."

"No, you did not. You didn't say anything about cops."

"Bullshit. You weren't paying attention."

Maybe he was right. We'd been drunk, or at least I'd been drunk, the first time he'd dropped that little morsel about Goto's Big Adventure in L.A., but I'm sure I would have remembered an important detail like that. Ninety-nine percent sure.

"Well, it's done now. He's gone. I did what I should have. And for the record, I don't like being someone else's pawn."

"*Zannen da ne* [too bad]."

There was a small table between us. He had his bag on the floor. There were cups of coffee in front of both of us. His was black. I loaded mine with cream and sugar.

I sipped a little more coffee. I figured that our conversation was over, and I got up to leave. He had one more thing to say as I was leaving.

"Say, whatever happened to your mistress?"

"What mistress?" The question made me very uneasy.

"You know the cunt I'm talking about."

"No."

"Some gaijin bitch. Helena was her name, right?"

I think that's when I got a very queasy feeling in my gut. I didn't have a snappy comeback. I sat back down. I took another drink of coffee.

"I know a woman named Helena. I've been trying to get ahold of her for a while. A long time."

"You won't ever hear from her. You killed her, you know?"

And the sonofabitch smiled, a big, fat, happy smile. The kind kids give you when you're telling a joke and they interrupt you with the punch line. He rolled the words off his lips like marbles: "You had her checking into the International Entertainment Association, right? She got caught snooping around. They dragged her to one of their offices, out in Ebisu. She had your business card on her. She wouldn't talk, you know. She wanted to protect your scrawny ass."

He explained what they'd done to her, at length and in detail. "It took them a couple hours. They tortured her for a while. Beat her. Raped her as well, with things lying around. She bled a lot. She probably choked to death on the cock stuffed in her mouth. Maybe her own puke. They might not have meant to kill her, but you know, she wouldn't talk."

He explained it all nonchalantly. He didn't even bother to lower his voice.

And when he was done, he added, "That was your fault for having her look around. If the Goto-gumi hadn't thought you were some kind of cop in disguise, they'd have killed you then too. You're a real pain in the ass."

"That's bullshit."

"Well, why would I know her name, then?"

I couldn't answer that one either. I know I hadn't given him the name. I had nothing to say. I had asked some of my sources to try to find out where she was, and maybe one guy had told him about her. I couldn't bring that up without the risk of burning my guy. I got lost in thought. He kicked the table.

“Still here? See, you’re not cracking jokes now.”

He pulled a manila envelope out of his leather bag and slapped it on the table.

“Consider this a present. I owed you once, I asked around on your behalf, and now we’re even.”

“What’s inside?”

“Photos. Why waste a good body? They took photos to show to the other girls working at the clubs. ‘This is what happens to troublemakers.’ Take a look. Then you’ll know I’m not jerking your chain.”

I took them out. They were horrible. I don’t feel a need to describe them in depth.

It was a woman. I don’t know if it was Helena. The hair was the same as hers, a long chestnut brown. The eyes were glazed over; I don’t think they looked like hers, but the eyes of the living and the dead are probably very different. I looked for the mole she had over her upper lip—couldn’t find it. But then again, they’d cut off her lips. It wasn’t a subtle message.

I didn’t have a long time to look them over either before he grabbed them out of my hand, and jammed them back into the envelope, and stuffed the envelope back into his bag.

I had a hard time not throwing up and a harder time not showing that I was feeling very, very ill. Suddenly, it felt as though gravity had been turned up so much that it was pulling me down to the ground and pinning me to my chair.

“In any event, good work. Goto’s effectively gone. That makes life a little easier for me.”

“I have one question.”

“I’m out of answers.”

“Did Goto order her killed? If she *was* actually killed.”

“What do you think?”

“I don’t know what I think. I want to know what happened.”

“I’m sure you would. Maybe someone called him and asked what to do. Maybe they did it on their own. I don’t know. Why don’t you ask Goto yourself?”

“You think he’d tell me?”

“No. I think it would be funny if you asked. Even if he gave the orders, I doubt he’d remember.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“So you know. So you know what happens when we don’t do what we’re supposed to do.”

“What was I supposed to have done?”

“You were supposed to have written a story about how Tadamasa Goto made a deal with the cops to get a liver transplant in the United States—and how as part of that deal he ratted out members of the Kodo-kai. That was what you were supposed to have done. That would have ended his career then and there.”

“And now I have. Goto and three other pricks who got liver transplants at UCLA. I exposed them all.”

Cyclops chuckled. “Well, you weren’t supposed to write about the other three. You weren’t even supposed to know about them. You pissed off a lot of people by digging that deep. I’ll give you this much, you’re a better reporter than I thought. You’re stupid, obtuse, stubborn, and reckless, but at the end of the day, I guess that’s what makes a good journo.”

We sat there in silence. I was thinking.

He stuck out his chin and raised his eyebrow.

“Well?”

“Well, what?”

“Well, when a man gives you a present, don’t you usually thank him for it?”

“Thank you.” It was the only thing I could think of to say.

“You’re welcome. I thought you’d want to know. It must be hard knowing that if you’d done the right thing, she’d still be alive. It must really suck. You know, a thing like this, it could also ruin a journalist’s career. Who’s going to trust a reporter who gets his sources killed?”

“If what you say is true, yeah.”

“You know it’s true, you cowardly prick. I don’t lie.”

“No,” I said, becoming a little angry, “you do lie. You’ve lied to me before, and I have no reason to believe you’re not lying to me now.”

“Why would I lie to you?”

“Because you’re a vengeful jerk and you want to make me as miserable as you are.”

He giggled. He was definitely high on something.

“Think I’d make up something like this just to fuck with you?”

“I don’t know. Why don’t you tell me?”

“You want to believe that, suit yourself. We’re done.” He stood up. I stood up.

“Look,” I said, holding out my hands, trying to keep him there a little longer, “just tell me that you’re telling the truth. Let me have one of the photos. I can get someone to look at them, maybe do a photo analysis, compare bone structure or something. I want to verify it’s her. That’s all I ask.”

He had the bag in his hand. He put it back on the table within a foot of me—close enough that I might have been able to grab it. It seemed as if he was daring me to try. He folded his arms and stared at me, cocked his head to the side. He smiled just a little, almost imperceptibly.

“You insult me.”

“You lied to me. You weren’t straight up about what you were doing or what you wanted. You manipulated me. You

played me like a sucker. How am I supposed to know you aren't doing it again? If you were standing in my shoes, you'd do the same."

Cyclops was unfazed. "But I'm not you. And if I were you, I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd be a man, and I'd kill Goto myself. It wouldn't be hard. I can tell you where to find him. Somewhere he goes alone."

"I'm not a yakuza."

"You're not a man, either."

"You're not much of a yakuza, either."

"Bullshit!"

"Yeah, well, you didn't even go to Shibata's funeral. Where's the loyalty, the respect?"

"I went. I didn't see your white gaijin ass there."

"So you knew Shibata. Was he the one who told you I was looking for her?"

He took the bag off the table and shrugged. "If I ever owed you anything, I don't anymore. We're done with that."

"Just give me a photo. If it's true, what you're saying, then I'll know for real. One fucking photo of her face. That's all I want."

"How much are you willing to pay for it? These are valuable things."

"How much do you want?"

"More than you have."

"I need a real answer."

"Good luck with that. Just make sure to stay out of my way."

"I don't know if that's possible."

He leaned forward a little and said very softly, "You were lucky once. Don't tempt fate. You were allowed to live because you were useful. Once Goto is gone, people may see you

differently. Cross me or my people the wrong way, and we'll crush you. There are ways to do that without even laying a finger on you." And he turned around and walked toward his gate. I have no idea where he is now. I'm certainly not going to go looking for him.

I know that Helena wanted to start a new life. She had money in the bank. She'd bought a home. She was beautiful, she was caring, she was brave, and she was very funny, if you appreciate ribald humor. Part of me wants to believe that she just packed up, cut ties, and started a new life. I keep in touch with some of her friends from that time. I still send New Year's greetings to her old e-mail address. They always come back undeliverable. But I hope that someday I'll get a reply. Maybe she'll hook up with one of us on Facebook. Sometimes, when I'm walking around Tokyo, I think I see her. I hear her voice. But it's never her.

I remember that one of the things homicide cops use to drag a confession out of a suspect is the line *"Kokuhaku shinai to hotoke ga ukabarenai."* It's almost a cliché, you see it in cop movies on television a lot. It translates loosely as "If you don't confess, the Buddha nature [of the dead] will not rise up—the victim will never achieve peace [Buddhahood]." It comes from a Japanese folk belief that those who have been murdered become trapped between incarnations, like a hungry ghost, until their death is avenged. In Buddhist mythology, even Heaven and Hell are just two of the stages of existence. Supposedly, we are doomed to repeat birth and rebirth until as human beings we achieve freedom from hatred, ignorance, and greed. What happens when that is achieved—well, that's never really satisfactorily answered. I imagine it's a very nice state of being.

If it's possible to be haunted by someone, I suppose that Helena haunts me—or I just haunt myself. I'm pretty sure she's

no longer alive. I'd like to believe differently. I dream about her now and then. Sometimes she's forgiving. Sometimes she's very angry. Sometimes she just asks to be held. I don't sleep very well. I haven't slept well since March 2006. If she is dead, maybe when Goto leaves this mortal coil, she'll finally be released. She'll finally get to where she wanted to go. I'd like to know she got there.

During the time I was collecting the last pieces of evidence, I became close to one of Goto's mistresses. Right before she left Japan in May 2008, we had one more meeting at Narita International Airport. I was bitching about the man, and she was listening patiently. She probably hated him more than I did. Halfway through my tirade, she stopped me.

"Jake, did it ever occur to you that you hate him so much because you're so much like him?"

"No, I don't see that at all."

"You're both workaholics with high libidos, adrenaline junkies, and shameless womanizers. You drink too much, you smoke too much, and you demand loyalty. You're generous to your friends and ruthless to your enemies. You'll do anything to get what you want. You are very much the same person. I see that in you."

"I don't accept that."

"You should think about it."

"So you're saying we're the same?"

She laughed. "No. There are two big differences."

"That's a relief. Tell me."

"You don't derive pleasure from the suffering of others and you don't betray your friends. That's huge."

And she lightly kissed me on the cheek and headed toward the security gates and her plane. I haven't seen her since. I think she's doing very well with her new life.

Once upon a time, I thought about being a Buddhist priest. I thought I'd like to be one of the good guys, do something for the world, something benevolent. When I was living in the temple, I tried. I didn't smoke, I didn't drink, I tried to walk the noble path. I wasn't very good at it.

On April 8, 2009, Tadamasa Goto, at a temple in Kanagawa, took the Buddhist vows and began his study toward becoming a Buddhist priest. Of course, it was probably more of a publicity stunt than a serious desire to repent for all the misery he's caused in this world. He's still facing another trial and probably wants to make a good impression on the judge. It's rumored that the top dogs at the Yamaguchi-gumi have put out a contract on his life—he knows too much, and he has a history of making deals with the cops. Maybe he figures it would be bad PR for them to kill a priest. Perhaps he's hoping a rosary will work as well as a bulletproof vest. Maybe he really regrets the way he's lived his life now that he's been stripped of power and is living in fear of death.

Still, it irks me a little. It seems blasphemous.

If he really does feel guilt for what he's done, if he really is repenting, I suppose I wish him well.

I know that I started out as one of the good guys. I'm not sure I ended that way.

I don't regret much of what I've done. Yes, maybe I started as a pawn, but I played the game as well as I could. I fought poison with poison and probably poisoned myself in the process, but that was the only way to do it. I protected my people and did my job, and in the end, that's a kind of victory.

I find it interesting that he and I both were amateur Buddhists. His reasons were probably more from expediency than faith, but then again, maybe he really does have a guilty conscience. It's possible.

I like reading some of the Buddhist sutras, although I'm not a convert. I'm not a believer in things like karma and

reincarnation. I'd like to believe. I'd like to believe that evil is punished and good is rewarded, that love conquers hatred, truth conquers lies, and everyone gets what's coming to them. You don't have to be too cynical to look around the world and see that that's not how it works.

Maybe it's being raised Jewish that allows for finding something satisfying in the unforgiving qualities of traditional Buddhism. The only way to really atone for doing wrong is to do the right thing. "I'm sorry" just doesn't cut it. There is no get-out-of-jail-free card in the deck. Makes sense to me.

Still, I find some comfort in the holy books, if you will. I particularly like the *Hokukyo*, a collection of Buddhist sayings—the sort of Q document of the religion. If Goto is seriously studying the Noble Path, he'll be reading it sooner or later. There are some passages that I'd like to highlight for him.

All beings quiver before violence.
All beings fear death.
All beings love life.
Remember that you are like them.
As they are like you.
Then whom would you hurt?
What harm would you do?
He who seeks happiness
By hurting others who seek happiness
Will never find happiness.
Not in the sky,
Nor in the depths of the sea,
Nor in the deepest mountains,
Can you hide from your misdeeds.

I hope when he lies on his futon late at night, rewinding and replaying the mental footage of his ill-spent life, Goto reflects on what he has done and what his soldiers have done, and that he thinks long and hard about those words.

I know that I do.

NOTE ON SOURCES AND SOURCE PROTECTION

One thing I have wrestled with in writing this book is how to do it in a way that would not endanger my sources and/or adversely affect the people involved. In Japan, a police officer leaking any information to a reporter can be criminally prosecuted; it can certainly cost him his job. It doesn't happen often, but that's not much consolation to the cop, prosecutor, or NPA bureaucrat who loses his job because I didn't protect his identity. For a yakuza, revealing organizational secrets or working with someone like myself can cost him his life.

I'm certainly not the first journalist or the first person in Japan to be threatened by yakuza. If they were *just* threats, it wouldn't be so bad. The problem, of course, is that yakuza sometimes live up to those threats. The respected yakuza journalist Mizoguchi Atsushi had the unpleasant experience of Yamaguchi-gumi members stabbing his son. They did it after he wrote a series of articles they found unflattering. They attacked not the author himself but his son—simply because his son happened to be around. It wasn't an isolated case of yakuza attacking civilians. When writing about organized crime in Japan, protecting sources can be a matter of life and death. I take it very seriously.

If Goto Tadamasa were still running his old organization, this book would have no acknowledgments and no dedications. But Goto's priest and guru, Jishu Tsukagoshi, insists that the former gang boss is now a devoted student of the Buddha and living a life of peace, atonement, and tolerance—so I'll assume things are different.

The other issue I wrestled with is that most of the women who worked in the sex industry when I was a reporter are now leading different lives. Some are married, some have children, most are in completely different jobs. I wouldn't feel good about shaming them or exposing their pasts.

I've gone to great lengths to protect the names of my sources in this book. I have changed names, used nicknames, altered nationalities and identifying details, and more. I've tried to keep a good balance between obscuring and misleading, and I hope that has worked.

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There are some people who didn't approve of the way I handled things, and I'm sure I have disappointed them. I did what I thought would work, and mostly it did.

Finally, thanks to all the people who stuck by me in hard times. I will remember, and I will repay in kind.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For those who are interested in knowing more about crime in Japan or the yakuza, or who would like to read the summary section of the NPA report on the Goto-gumi, I've posted it and some relevant materials on my often neglected Web site, www.japansubculture.com. Much of it is in Japanese—sorry about that. Someday it will be a truly bilingual thing.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jake Adelstein was a reporter for the *Yomiuri Shinbun*, Japan's largest newspaper, from 1993 to 2005. From 2006 to 2007 he was the chief investigator for a U.S. State Department–sponsored study of human trafficking in Japan. Considered one of the foremost experts on organized crime in Japan, he works as a writer and consultant in Japan and the United States. He is also the public relations director for the Washington, D.C.–based Polaris Project Japan, which combats human trafficking and the exploitation of women and children in the sex trade.

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